

ALMA MATER STUDIORUM – UNIVERSITA' DI BOLOGNA

**SCUOLA DI LINGUE E LETTERATURE, TRADUZIONE E
INTERPRETAZIONE**

Corso di studio in Letterature moderne, comparate e postcoloniali

**Curriculum Women's and Gender Studies - Studi di genere e delle donne
(GEMMA)**

**Women's Empowerment and Religious Discourses:
Reconsidering Women's Christianity, Utopianism and
Feminism**

Prova finale in: Women's popular culture: women's travel literature and critical utopias -
Donne e cultura popolare

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Sessione: II appello

Anno Accademico: 2017/2018

Women's Empowerment and Religious Discourses: Reconsidering Women's Christianity, Utopianism and Feminism

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Alma Mater Studiorum

Università di Bologna

Scuola di Lingue e Letterature, Traduzione e Interpretazione

September 2018

Acknowledgements

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to professor Gilberta Golinelli for trusting in me and encourage me throughout this process. Her feedback, comments and suggestions were incalculable and precious. I also want to thank the professors of the GEMMA Master at the University of Bologna for transmitting me their passion for literature and women's studies. I would not have decided to walk down this path without their example.

Igualmente quiero agradecer a María Espinosa Spínola, mi cotutora, pues su orientación fue fundamental para la realización del trabajo de campo y para el subsiguiente análisis del caso de estudio. Mi gratitud también se extiende a las profesoras del Master GEMMA en la Universidad de Granada, quienes me inspiraron para trabajar en nuevas áreas e intentar realizar una investigación interdisciplinar.

Agradezco igualmente a los miembros de la IDMJI ubicada en Milán por participar en mi investigación y permitirme ser parte de su comunidad. Sin su buena disposición y candidez este proyecto habría quedado incompleto.

Este proceso no habría sido posible sin el apoyo, la paciencia y el amor de mi familia. Agradezco profundamente a mis padres por sostenerme a largo de este camino. Madre, gracias por estar incluso desde la distancia y por oír cada uno de mis problemas. Padre, gracias por nuestras largas charlas, aunque no concluyéramos nada, al final todo siempre parecía más claro. Hermana, sin su insistencia y aliento nada de esto habría ocurrido. Gracias por animarme a seguir adelante aun cuando todo parecía tan incierto.

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Abstracts

My research aims to show how women have historically used and are still using Christian principles and practices to advocate for their rights and advance their interests. In England, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, moving from Christian principles, formulated concrete utopian projects aimed to overcome the degraded condition of women. During the nineteenth century, Radical Unitarian in England advocated for women's rights based on the idea that the equality between the sexes as intended by God had been disrupted by the customs of the time, and that it could only be restored through education and a wide social revolution. Across the Atlantic, four Quaker women and Elizabeth Cady Stanton called for the first Women's Rights Convention, held at Seneca Falls on July 1848. The subsequent Declaration of Rights and Sentiments is infused with religious sentiments, declaring that woman is man's equal because it was intended so by their Creator. At the wake of the twentieth century Pentecostalism was born in the United States. For Pentecostals the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, a miraculous event which gives them prophetic authority and certain Godly gifts, can happen to anyone, man or woman. Women, like Maria Woodworth-Etter and Aimee Semple McPherson, had important roles as pioneers of this new faith. Pentecostalism expanded throughout Latin America, resulting in the creation of autochthonous churches. In Colombia one of these churches is currently led by a woman, and the female parishioners state that the church has improved their marital and interpersonal relations and has given them the strength to undertake different projects, thus boosting their self-esteem. However, this positive relation between religion and women's interests has a controversial side, because it sustains some gender-sex stereotypes and can act against women's self-determination and the rights of other oppressed groups.

L'obiettivo della mia ricerca è mostrare come le donne abbiano storicamente utilizzato e continuano a utilizzare i principi e le pratiche cristiane per difendere i propri diritti e promuovere i propri interessi. In Inghilterra, durante il XVII e il XVIII secolo, Mary Astell e Mary Wollstonecraft, basandosi su principi cristiani, formularono progetti utopici concreti volti a superare la condizione svantaggiata delle donne. Durante il XIX secolo, le *Radical Unitarians* in Inghilterra sostenevano i diritti delle donne basandosi

sull'idea che l'uguaglianza tra i sessi, prevista da Dio, fosse stata perturbata dalle abitudini dell'epoca e che pertanto potesse essere ripristinata soltanto attraverso l'educazione e un'ampia rivoluzione sociale. Dall'altra parte dell'Atlantico, quattro donne quacchere ed Elizabeth Cady Stanton convocarono la prima Convenzione sui diritti delle donne, tenutasi a Seneca Falls nel luglio del 1848. La successiva “Dichiarazione dei diritti e dei sentimenti” è ispirata da sentimenti religiosi, e dichiara che la donna è uguale all'uomo perché così concepito dal loro Creatore. Agli inizi del XX secolo, negli Stati Uniti nacque il Pentecostalismo. Per i pentecostali il battesimo dello Spirito Santo, evento miracoloso che conferisce loro autorità profetica e certi doni divini, può accadere a chiunque, uomo o donna. Le donne, tra le quali Maria Woodworth-Etter e Aimee Semple McPherson, ricoprirono ruoli importanti come pioniere di questa nuova fede. Il pentecostalismo si espanse in tutta l'America Latina, con la conseguente creazione di chiese autoctone. In Colombia una di queste chiese è attualmente guidata da una donna, e le fedeli affermano che la chiesa ha migliorato le loro relazioni coniugali e interpersonali e ha dato loro la forza di intraprendere diversi progetti, aumentando così la loro autostima. Tuttavia, questa relazione positiva tra la religione e gli interessi delle donne ha un aspetto controverso, perché mantiene determinati stereotipi di genere e può pertanto ostacolare l'autodeterminazione delle donne e i diritti di altri gruppi oppressi.

El objetivo de mi investigación es mostrar cómo las mujeres históricamente han usado y siguen usando principios y prácticas cristianas para defender sus derechos y promover sus intereses. En Inglaterra, durante los siglos XVII y XVIII, Mary Astell y Mary Wollstonecraft, basadas en principios cristianos, formularon proyectos utópicos concretos destinados a superar la condición de desventaja de las mujeres. Durante el siglo XIX, las practicantes del unitarismo radical en Inglaterra defendieron los derechos de las mujeres basadas en que la igualdad de los sexos prevista por Dios había sido alterada por las costumbres de la época, y solo podía restablecerse mediante educación y una amplia revolución social. Al otro lado del Atlántico, cuatro cuáqueras y Elizabeth Cady Stanton convocaron a la primera Convención de los Derechos de la Mujer, celebrada en Seneca Falls en julio de 1848. La sucesiva Declaración de Derechos y Sentimientos está inspirada en sentimientos religiosos y, declara que la mujer es igual al hombre porque así fue concebido por su Creador. A principio del siglo XX, surge el pentecostalismo en los Estados Unidos. Para los pentecostales el bautismo del Espíritu Santo, un evento

milagroso que les otorga autoridad profética y ciertos dones divinos, puede sucederle a cualquiera, hombre o mujer. Mujeres como Maria Woodworth-Etter y Aimee Semple McPherson fueron pioneras de esta nueva fe. El pentecostalismo se expandió por toda América Latina, dando como resultado la creación de iglesias autóctonas. En Colombia, una de estas iglesias es actualmente dirigida por una mujer, y las feligresas afirman que la iglesia ha mejorado sus relaciones matrimoniales e interpersonales y les ha dado la fuerza para emprender diferentes proyectos, aumentando su autoestima. Sin embargo, esta relación positiva entre religión y los intereses de las mujeres tiene un lado controversial, pues mantiene y agudiza ciertos estereotipos de género y puede actuar contra la autodeterminación de las mujeres y los derechos de otros grupos oprimidos.

Introduction

Postulating Christianity as a source of empowerment for women might seem like an oxymoron. Although from the 1970s and 1980s onwards, there have been different studies from diverse perspectives on the matter of women and religion, religious beliefs seem to be considered by most feminists as against women's liberation and women's rights movements. In fact, some religious feminists feel that "women of faith are mocked for actually claiming a feminist identity and working within our traditions to combat sexism." (Zoibar, Messina-Dysert and Levin 2015)

The mainstream position about the relationship between Christianity and feminism and/or the empowerment of women seems to be well represented by Daphne Hampson¹ and her book *Theology and Feminism*². In it, after summarizing the different positions in Christian Theology, she concludes that Christianity and feminism are incompatible.

For Hampson Christianity is a historical patriarchal religion. Historical because "it proclaims there to have been a revelation of God in history. Therefore, that time and that particular history in which the revelation is deemed to have taken place become integral to the religion" (1990, 7). And patriarchal because in that history "women are either absent, or present fulfilling for the most part the roles which were assigned to women in that society. The figure of Christ is that of a male figure, and that is not to be evaded. God is conveyed through the use of metaphors which are male not female. And that history is not to be disposed of" (9).

Hence, because Christianity is a historical religion, and the historical reference that it has is a patriarchal one, Hampson claims that it cannot be compatible with feminist thought. In fact, she maintains that Christianity harms women because "that history and that revelation... are in some sense normative for the religion" and keep women in a secondary position with respect to men (1990, 10). Consequently, for Hampson Christianity cannot be moral because it serves to legitimise the discrimination and subordination of women. Moreover, she claims that Christianity cannot be true, because

¹ Daphne Hampson is an Associate Faculty member of the Department of Theology and Religion at Oxford University. She played a leading role in the campaign to allow women to be ordained in the Anglican Churches in Britain. She is a theologian and has a background in history. Information about her can be found in http://www.daphnehampson.co.uk/Daphne_Hampson_Homepage/Home.html and <https://www.theology.ox.ac.uk/people/dr-daphne-hampson>. Last accessed July 30, 2018.

² Although the book was published in 1990, what it postulates is still valid when it comes to the position of mainstream feminisms in regards of religion in general and of Christianity in particular.

its particularity³ cannot be upheld unless one believes that God relates differently to one particular age or people⁴.

Her refutation of Christianity does not mean, however, a total dismissal of religiosity. In fact, Hampson states, “there can be no reason why one should not be a feminist and a religious person” (1990, 8), and proposes to find

...a way to conceptualize God which is independent of the Christian myth, a myth which is neither tenable nor ethical. We must find a way to capture our experience of God in the language of our day. In doing this we shall be doing no more than did others in their time, drawing on the cultural milieu in which they lived. There is nothing to prevent our taking up past conceptualizations of God if we wish. But we are not constrained to do so if new thought forms appear more persuasive... We shall need language and metaphor. But that we shall need a highly articulated mythology and symbolism, such as Christianity employs, would seem to be unlikely... Nor do we necessarily... need concrete and anthropomorphic images of God. (Hampson 1990, 171-172)

Although Hampson’s approach, as she herself states, does not imply the need for an anthropomorphic feminine God, it can be related, at least in part, with Luce Irigaray’s theory of subjectivity.

In *Divine Women* (Femmes Divines)⁵, Irigaray poses that in order to achieve full subjectivity, that is, in order to ‘become’, “it is necessary to have an essence or a genre⁶ (sic) (henceforth gendered) as a horizon. Otherwise becoming remains partial and subjected” (1986, 4). She identifies the horizon with a divine role model, namely, with an infinite, perfect God to which we should be able to aspire. In her own words “To set up a genre (sic), a God is needed”, because “Only the divine offers freedom and imposes it on

³ For Hampson Christianity’s particularity consists in the incarnation of God in the figure of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion and later resurrection.

⁴ “I do not believe, whatever I may mean by God, that it could be said of God that God was differently related to one age or people than God is related all ages or people. God is something which is always available, however much people in some ages, or some people in each age, may appear to be more aware of God. To put this differently and more technically, I do not believe that the causal nexus of history, or that of nature, could be broken. That is to say, I do not believe that there could be peculiar events, such as a resurrection, or miracles, events which interrupt the normal causal relationships persisting in history and in nature. I do not believe in uniqueness.” (Hampson 1990, 8).

⁵ Originally published in French in 1985 and translated to English in 1986.

⁶ The English translation uses the word *genre*, which means “a style or category of art, music, or literature” (Oxford English Dictionary), when it should use the word *gender*. This mistranslation maybe due to the fact that in French, as well as in other languages like Italian or Spanish, the word for genre and gender is the same: in French it is *genre*, in Italian *genere* and in Spanish *género*. The assumption that this is a mistranslation comes from the aforementioned fact, but also from the fact that in other texts where Irigaray refers to the necessity of a feminine divine she uses the term *gender* when referring to the categories of men and women and not *genre* (See “Toward a Divine in the Feminine” in *Women and the Divine. Touching Transcendence...*). Although I will maintain the original translation, unless it is mentioned otherwise, the use of the term *genre* in the citation of “Divine Women” means *gender*.

us. Only a God can constitute a place of coming together for us which can leave us free, nothing else” (Irigaray 1986, 3. 9).

The problem Irigaray exposes is that while man “can exist because God helps him define his genre (sic)” and have “found a way to avoid... finitude in a unique masculine God” (Irigaray 1986, 3-4), women lack a God in the feminine. “There is no woman God. No feminine trinity” (4). The only feminine model in the Christian tradition is the Virgin Mary, which for Irigaray “paralyses the infinite of female becoming in maternity and in the task of incarnating the son of God” (1986, 4).

Irigaray is not talking from a theological stand, but from a philosophical and psychoanalytical one, in which she considers that both men and women need to achieve full subjectivity. In order to do so, she considers that it is necessary to overcome the idea that

...only one subject exists—presumed neuter and universal, but elaborated starting from the necessities of man—, [and instead] reach a culture of two subjects: one masculine and one feminine. These two subjects are irreducible, the one to the other. They cannot be substituted the one for the other, nor subjected to a hierarchical assessment. They really are two, two who are qualitatively and not quantitatively different. There is not a first subject followed by a second subject less perfect than the first. Two subjects exist who correspond to different values, different beings and Beings, and who need different subjective accomplishments or fulfilments. Each subject requires a different manner of becoming divine. (Irigaray 2009, 14).

Thus, for Irigaray it is necessary for women to have a God in the feminine, even a feminine trinity, because without it “they find themselves squeezed into models which don’t suit them, which exile them, go in their stead, mask them, cut them up inside, taking away their progress...” (Irigaray 1986, 6).

Although the idea of a new way of apprehending God away from the Judeo-Christian tradition (Hampson) or of conceiving a God in the feminine (Irigaray), are perfectly valid in a philosophical and theoretical way, these approaches seem to disregard what for many is a fundamental part of their identity and as a consequence, judging that particular element as disposable.

An example of this is Hampson’s attitude in front of the claim made by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza that “Western women... are not able to discard completely and forget our personal, cultural or religious Christian history. We will either transform it into a new liberating future or continue to be subject to its tyranny whether we recognize its power

or not” (1990, 35)⁷. Hampson disregards Shüssler Fiorenza’s concerns by stating that women “may today distance ourselves from, indeed reject, [biblical Christian] tradition should we wish” (1990, 36). A statement that seems to come from personal experience, because Hampson herself decided to leave Christianity. However, although a valid choice, I do not believe that it can be demanded from every other religious woman.

The position of Hampson and Irigaray also rejects the possibility of women effectively fighting sexism and patriarchy should they decide to remain within their faiths. Irigaray points out, “When liberation or the liberty of women gets bogged down or takes a backward turn, it would seem that this would be for different motives: the absence of God for them and an inappropriate management of the symbolic Gods... Lots of women are doing or have done lots of work, only to fall once again under the influence of the monopoly of phallographic and patriarchal values” (1986, 12). In other words, for Irigaray, if we, as women, remain within the historical religion that is Christianity, we “can only then be second with respect to man, to men, as was the case in our past patriarchal or phallographic tradition” (2009, 15).

Although I understand the different critics made by Hampson and Irigaray, some of which I share –at least as doubts about my personal faith–, and without any intention of implying either that they are wrong nor that I can, with my limited experience both personal and academic, formulate a better solution; I do consider that such radical positions in regards of religion, instead of building bridges, burns them. As Jennifer Zobair, Gina Messina-Dysert and Amy Levin superbly state in their 2015 article,

...even if every Jewish, Christian, and Muslim feminist abandoned her tradition, there would still be many women who stay, women for whom that decision has religious jurisprudential consequences. They will still be subject to Halakhah, Canon law, and fatwas. They will still face exclusion from leadership roles. They will still endure pressure from community members who accept women’s lesser status based on the teachings of unenlightened rabbis, priests, and imams.

Feminism(s) is (are) not only about the equality of women, but, and foremost, a new way of seeing the world, of constructing identity and achieving subjectivity, where there is space for everyone without hierarchies. If we as feminists believe in a utopian future which is better for all, then I do believe that we must admit that there are different ways of achieving this goal; one of which is precisely the possibility of fighting patriarchy and sexism within different religious traditions, and, in the case of this dissertation, within

⁷ Hampson is citing Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983; London: SCM Press, 1983. P. xix.

the Christian one. This admission means the possibility of building bridges with the women who are part of those traditions, even if we ourselves do not share them entirely.

In this task, I believe the position of Rosemary Radford Ruether to be of assistance. Ruether (1983), using what Hampson later refers to as a “golden thread approach” (1990, 27-29), affirms that there is a place for women within the historical tradition of Christianity, identifying it with the prophetic-liberating principle. This principle is the promise of God, through Jesus, of a new system where peace and justice would come for all, in which not only the full humanity and subjectivity of women should and will be recognized, but also the full humanity of all oppressed groups.

Ruether considers the prophetic-liberation tradition⁸ as “the axis around which the prophetic-messianic line of Biblical faith revolves as a foundation of Christianity” (1983, 24), in basis of which one can differentiate between normative and non-normative principles in the Bible. Hence, these principles “imply a rejection of every elevation of one social group against others as image and agent of God, every use of God to justify social domination and subjugation” (23).

The operation Ruether calls for goes as follows: if Biblical texts reflect the normative principle of prophetic-liberation, then they must be regarded as authoritative. If they do not reflect the aforementioned principle, they must be rejected. Under this process, “Patriarchy itself must fall under the Biblical denunciations of idolatry and blasphemy, the idolizing of the male as representative of divinity. It is idolatrous to make males more ‘like God’ than females. It is blasphemous to use the image and name of the Holy to justify patriarchal domination and law” (Ruether 1983, 23).

All of this process comes from the conception that “the effort to express contemporary experience in a cultural and historical vacuum is both self-deluding and unsatisfying... Only by finding an alternative historical community and tradition more deeply rooted than those that have become corrupted can one feel sure that in criticizing the dominant tradition one is not subjectively criticizing the dominant tradition but is, rather, touching a deeper bedrock of authentic Being upon which to ground the self. One cannot wield the lever of criticism without a place to stand” (Ruether 1983, 18).

⁸ This choosing of a normative principle, explains Ruether, “is hardly a new idea in Christianity”, and places two examples: 1) the set aside by early Christians of Hebrew ritual law in favour of ethical interiority, despite the facts that texts continue to be part of the Old Testament; and 2) the rejection of biblical texts that justify slavery. Thus, she concludes, “all theologies, regardless of their claims that the Bible is totally the work of inspiration, in fact never considers all parts of the Bible equally authoritative; rather they use texts according to implicit or explicit assumptions about the normative development of Biblical faith” (Ruether 1983, 23).

With this dissertation, I want to contribute to the construction of the historical relation between Christianity and women's demands for self-determination and change; showing that it is neither a thing of the past nor a present phenomenon, but instead that it can be found throughout our recent history in different periods and varied geographical locations. I intend to explore how different women in different contexts have experienced Christianity in a positive, empowering way; a way that allowed them to think of better and, I would add, utopian futures, and allows them, even today, to face the world with hope. This does not mean that all the women I refer to in the present dissertation have the same idea of God or profess the same kind of Christianity. The women and denominations I analyse belong to different expressions of Christianity, from High Anglican Mary Astell in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, to neo-Pentecostal women in a Colombian Church, covering a wide range of practices within the Christian tradition, all of them following the protestant reform.

I am not a theologian. My approach is a historical and a pragmatic one. I aim to describe how Christianity has materially helped different women, in different historical moments, up to the present, to find their voice and fight for their rights. With this, my goal, as someone who herself has had an internal battle to reconcile her Christian faith with her feminist beliefs, is to find a way of building bridges between the two. However, this quest is not just for personal comfort. I believe that finding those bridges or points of connection can also serve as a political tool in the fight for the rights of women and other oppressed groups, where, more often than not, conservative and, I believe, corrupted notions of God and Christianity are used to keep women in a secondary, subjugated place. If we can fight those conservative notions with reevaluated ones that come directly from women's experiences of Christianity, we can then dismantle sexism and patriarchy from within.

Although in this dissertation I am exploring the possible positive relation between Christianity and the empowerment of women, I do not deny that this relation can be controversial. Because of Christianity's particular history, even if the cases I analyse advocate for women's rights, they still consider a fundamental part of being a woman the possibility and actual fact of being wives and mothers. Furthermore, in the case of the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International (CGMJCI⁹), according to my

⁹ The Spanish name of this Church is: Iglesia de Dios Ministerial de Jesucristo Internacional (IDMJI). Both acronyms are the official ones use by the Church in its official website <https://idmji.org/en/> Last accessed September 9, 2018

research, its members are against abortion and the LGBTQ+ community and its rights and liberties.

I recognize that this possesses a problem for feminism. Firstly, it maintains gender stereotypes that have kept women in a secondary role in society. Secondly, it denies bodily autonomy and sexual freedom, when both feminist movements and LGBTQ+ movements have fought for the recognition of these aspects as human rights. Thirdly, and most importantly, it goes against the idea that feminism is not only the search for equality, but also the search for a better world, one that overcomes all oppressions and hierarchies. By opposing the bodily autonomy of women, forcing them to be mothers, and by denying the subjectivity of LGBTQ+ people, one denies that utopic better world.

Nevertheless, I believe there is hope. Despite the negative elements mentioned above, these examples show that Christianity has served and still serves as a vehicle for women to find their voice and demand and obtain changes. Although I do not delude myself and I recognize that we are living in times that seem particularly reactive, I have confidence in the fact that finding bridges and points of connections with Christian believers is one of the ways in which we can start an honest conversation with them. Instead of attacking their faith, we can show them how it can be interpreted and lived in a different way. A way that allows us to recognize value in all and reach “a new mode of relationship, neither a hierarchical model that diminishes the potential of the ‘other’ nor an ‘equality’ defined by a ruling norm drawn from the dominant group; rather a mutuality that allows us to affirm different ways of being” (Ruether 1983, 20).

The first chapter explains the methodology used in this work. In it I justify why I chose the experiences of Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft as a starting point for my dissertation, as well as why I consider it relevant to include the contemporary experience of the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International (CGMJCI). It also includes the way these two starting points can relate to each other, by way of the ascendancy Christianity had in the first formal feminist movements in England and the United States, and the influence that women had in the creation of new Christian denominations. It also includes a description of the main categories of analysis used in the present dissertation.

The second chapter describes the Christian influences of Mary Astell (1666-1731) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), and how they are articulated in their works, particularly *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (Astell, Part I 1694. Part II 1697) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 1792). It also aims to show how these two female writers, although almost a century apart and in different sides of the

political spectrum, advocated in favour of women based on similar Christian principles. For both writers, men and women were God's creatures, a representation of His perfect and infinite love. As such, both genders were entitled to be educated so they could develop their God-given reason and meet their Maker in the afterlife. They both proposed different methods for achieving this goal in ways that can be considered utopian formulations, where pragmatic solutions and the longing for a better community play a fundamental role.

The third chapter is dedicated to the roles played by Quakers and other dissenting women in their respective communities, as well as the roles they played both in England and in the United States during the first wave of feminism. This chapter serves as a bridge between the works of Astell and Wollstonecraft and the case study of the role women play in the CGMJCI. For this reason, it also includes an account of the influence that women, such as Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter and Aimee Semple McPherson, had on the foundation of new Christian denominations in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The fourth chapter is the analysis of the case study under scrutiny. It starts with a small introduction on how the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements born in the United States expanded throughout Latin America, and how they arrived in Colombia. Then it centres on the analysis of the case study base, among others, on: 1) the autobiography written by its spiritual leader, Maria Luisa Piraquive, entitled *Vivencias*. 2) The testimonies and life narratives recorded during individual and group interviews with members, mainly women, of the CGMJCI in Milan, Italy. 3) The publications that some of its outstanding members, primarily the women that hold public office in Colombia as members of the Church's political party¹⁰, do in social media such as Facebook and Twitter. 4) The public description that the CGMJCI does of itself through its official website.

The last chapter contains my final reflections on the matter, that is, on the positive relation that can exist between Christianity and the empowerment of women.

¹⁰ The Party's name is *Movimiento Integral de Renovación Absoluta* (MIRA).

Chapter 1. Methodology

This dissertation seeks to portray different ways in which Christianity and feminism(s) or women's movements can relate in a positive, constructive way leading to women's cultural, political and economic empowerment. In order to do so, I attempted to trace a probable women's genealogy in order to problematize if, and if so, how, women, through their appropriation and experience of Christianity found a voice and fought or are still fighting on behalf of women's rights and their recognition as full human beings.

My analysis is necessarily underpinned by an interdisciplinary methodology. Its point of departure are the experiences and writings of two British female authors of the long eighteenth century who today are considered as feminists or, at least, proto-feminists: Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, because their works and demands on behalf of women were deeply supported and influenced by their religious beliefs. It proceeds with a historical trace of the Christian foundations of the first women's movements in both England and the United States; as well as of the influence that women had in the establishment of new Christian denominations in the United States at the wake of the twentieth century. It concludes with an attempted anthropological analysis of a Colombian Church, the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International (CGMJCI), internationally led by a female pastor, which, through the medium of governmental and social service and efforts, has given women the possibility to access ways of personal, economic and political empowerment.

All these cases involve different ways of practising, experiencing, and conceiving Christianity, not because I consider it the only religion that can relate in a positive way with the struggle of women, but because I belong to a particular historical tradition in which Christianity is central. I do not discard, *a priori*, the possibility that other religious traditions, i.e., Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, among others may be able to have a positive relation with the search for women's equality and the recognition and defence of their rights and subjectivity. However, I do not feel I have authority to discuss it because I do not have enough cultural, personal or academic instruments to do so in a way that recognizes all of their particularities, without tergiversations or even prejudice. In this decision, I take my cue from Rosemary Radford Ruether, who explains that her work on feminist theology "can only be from the historical tradition, in its broadest sense, that has defined [her] identity" (1983, 21), which for her, as well as for me, is Christianity.

This dissertation starts with an analysis of Mary Astell's and Mary Wollstonecraft's efforts to improve to condition of women. Astell was a member of the High Church of England, while Wollstonecraft professed her own kind of Christianity, influenced by Anglicanism, the Dissenters and the Christian Platonists (Taylor, 2002, 2003). Although not the same in nature, these two authors professed a Protestant Christianity that was supposed to be sober and based upon reason.

In Part I of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their true and greatest interest. By a lover of her Sex*¹¹, written by Astell in 1694, she condemns faith led by passions and affections, because "Such Persons are always in extreams, they are either violently good or quite cold and indifferent; a perpetual trouble to themselves and others, by indecent Raptures, or unnecessary Scruples"¹² (SPL Part I, 71). Instead, Astell advocates for a Christianity chosen by the use of reason, which for her meant the one professed by the Church of England. Wollstonecraft makes the same kind of appreciations in section 1, chapter 13 of her *A Vindication of the rights of Woman*¹³ (1792), in which she criticizes women going to visit fortune-tellers and/or miracle-making people, even those that justified their *power* on having a gift from God, because religion should be rational¹⁴.

This contrasts with the other denominations that are part of the present dissertation. Quakers "maintain that the Light of Christ is in every individual, regardless of gender, social status, race, or nationality". They guided their action according to revelation, and some even "shunned appeals to the Bible altogether, believing that if someone were 'in the Light', then they already had direct understanding of the Word of God" (Broad and Green 2009, 164). Because revelation could come to anyone, both men and women were considered able to preach. Considering this particularity, Patricia Howell Michaelson affirms that "women's preaching received, probably, as much attention as any aspect of Quaker practice" although she recognizes that even if pastoral

¹¹ From here on after this book will be referred as Part I or as A Serious Proposal Part I. For citation purposes, it will be quoted as SPL Part I.

¹² The quotes from Mary Astell's *Proposal* keep the grammar and spelling of the original text as presented in Patricia Springborg's edition.

¹³ For citation purposes, this book will be quoted as VRW.

¹⁴ "Rational religion, on the contrary, is a submission to the will of a being so perfectly wise, that all he wills must be directed by the proper motive—must be reasonable.

And, if thus we respect God, can we give credit to the mysterious insinuations which insult his laws? Can we believe, though it should stare us in the face, that he would work a miracle to authorize confusion by sanctioning an error? Yet we must either allow these impious conclusions, or treat with contempt every promise to restore health to a diseased body by supernatural means, or to foretell, the incidents that can only be foreseen by God" (VRW, 183).

practices where open to anyone, “in practice, of course, women did *not* have equal authority” (1993, 282-283). This kind of Christian practice, which depends on actual revelation to a particular person, is highly different from the rational religion predicated by both Astell and Wollstonecraft.

However, it would be Quaker women and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who organized the Seneca Falls Convention that took place in 1848 in order to “discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of Woman”. According to Judith Wellman, “Quakers would form the single largest religious group at the Seneca Falls woman’s rights convention” and “Just as no woman’s rights convention would have occurred in Seneca Falls in 1848 without Elizabeth Cady Stanton, so it would not have occurred without these egalitarian Friends. Stanton was the catalyst. Friends transformed the idea into action.” (2004, 92). Thus, it is possible to say that these Christian women had a pivotal role in the birth of Western feminism-

Finally, we have Pentecostals. This Christian denomination, as pointed out by Douglas Jacobsen, is not defined institutionally. One characteristic which makes it different from other Christian practices is that “Pentecostalism is [a] Spirit-centered faith. It is [a] belief in the present-day power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles and supernaturally change lives... Pentecostals sense the Spirit more intensely, and they expect the Spirit to act more visibly and dramatically” (2006, 4). Pentecostals believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and in gifts that come with that baptism, such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesy, they “assume that all of these miraculous powers, and possibly more, are available to Christians today in the same way that the New Testament says they were available to Christians in the first century” (Jacobsen 2006, 4). Pentecostals then, privileged affectivity and an experiential kind of faith. From the very beginning of the movement, at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, women had important roles in it, as pioneers, founders of churches and ministers. This is the case of Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter and Aimee Semple McPherson, among others (Jacobsen, 2006; Stephenson, 2012; Payne, 2015).

The CGMJCI identifies itself as a Neo-Pentecostal Church. Its Statement of Faith declares that “the main spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit that operates in Church is the gift of prophecy (sic)” (Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International 2017). According to the autobiography of Maria Luisa Piraquive, the Church’s current leader, the Holy Spirit revealed to her that women were able to preach and serve God in the same way as men, working shoulder to shoulder with them. Several of the women I interviewed

told me that having a female leader and the aforementioned revelation were a source of empowerment to them, because it gave them mental strength and allowed them to believe that they could study, work, and even face motherhood. One of them, Doris¹⁵, told me that “The value they give to women here is incalculable... We see here that the value of women is very indispensable, and that here God has women working and that the leader of this temple is a woman... Here we feel loved, respected and that our opinion counts a lot. And that most of the people here who serve God are women”¹⁶.

All these different forms of experiencing Christianity have empowered and continue to empower women in different ways, although not without conflicts or critics. The reason why I decided to analyse different cases throughout history, is because part of my final goal is to show that the positive link between women and Christianity is not just something from the past, nor only a new thing born out of the position that women have in society today. Thus, I sought a large enough sample of different experiences which could serve as vehicles for generating dialogues between feminist thinking and religious practices.

In regard to the fact that all these expressions belong to the Protestant tradition, I would like to clarify that this does not mean that other expressions of Christianity, namely, Catholicism, cannot have a positive influence in the empowerment of women or that I consider them incompatible with feminism. For example, on her research on the life of religious women and female religious societies in premodern Europe, all of them Catholic, Patricia Ranft concluded that,

Religious life offered women an alternative to marriage, regardless of the wishes of parents (Christina of Markyate), and an alternative to bearing children (Melanie the Younger). It offered them a place to function on their own, away from familiar control (Angela Arnauld). Very frequently it provided them with a means to become educated (Lioba) and even sometimes with the means to develop their creative genius in the arts (Hildegard of Bingen) and literature (Hrotsvith). It reserved the only positions of authority society designated exclusively for women (the abbess). In its asexual theology of sanctity women were equal to men (Paula). On occasion it provided a platform of political power (Hilda of Whitby). Often it became the means for women to adapt to new social conditions (Mary of Oignies) and to solve new social problems (Louise de Marillac). Because it provided women with all these opportunities, religious life played a

¹⁵ The names of all the people interviewed have been changed in order to keep their anonymity.

¹⁶ The interview was originally in Spanish: “El valor que le dan a la mujer aquí es incalculable... vemos aquí que el valor de la mujer es muy indispensable, y que aquí Dios tiene trabajando a la mujer y que la líder de este templo es una mujer... donde aquí nos sentimos amadas, respetadas y que nuestra opinión cuenta mucho. Y que la mayoría de las personas aquí que le sirven a Dios son mujeres”. This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

more significant role in women's history than it does in men's history. Men had other options; women did not. (Ranft 1998, 130)

We can find women both in the past and in the present, who, professing the Catholic faith, were able to find their voice and express their opinions, even changing the order of things and having effects that ripple through our age.

Margery Kempe (circa 1373-1438), a Christian Mystic –formally Catholic, even if she faced trial because of “her allegedly teaching and preaching on scripture and faith in public” (World Heritage Encyclopedia n.d.)-, is known for having dictated *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which contains the account of her domestic life and her pilgrimages to the Holy Land and holy sites in Europe. Her book is considered one of the first autobiographies written in English, as well as the first travel book written, or at least dictated, by a woman.

Saint Teresa de Avila (1515-1582), the first woman to be declared a doctor of the Church in 1970 by Pope Paul VI, was the founder of the Discalced Carmelites and played a fundamental role in the Counter Reformation (Ranft 1998; World Heritage Encyclopedia n.d.). Saint Teresa, apart from her important place within the Catholic Saints, has been widely analysed in literary studies, thanks to her autobiography written in the form of a confession¹⁷.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695), a Mexican poet and writer from colonial times, is famously known for her poems, sonnets and the letter *Respuesta de la poetisa a la muy ilustre Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, in which she veiledly¹⁸ defended herself from the accusations made by the Bishop of Puebla. Sor Juana had and still has an enormous influence in Latin American culture and literary studies, where she is considered one of the most influential writers of colonial times¹⁹.

¹⁷ See, for example: Slade, Carol. *St. Teresa of Avila. Author of a Heroic Life*. Los Angeles. University of California Press. 1995; Carrera, Elena. *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography: Authority, Power and the Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain*. London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing. 2005; Dopico-Black, Georgina. “Anatomies of a Saint: The Unstable Body of Teresa de Jesús” in *A Companion to Spanish Women Studies*. Edited by Geraldine Coates and Xon de Ros, 109-127. London: Tamesis, 2010.

¹⁸ See the analysis made in Ludmer, Josefina. “Tretas del Débil.” In *La sartén por el mango. Encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas*, edited by Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega, 47-54. Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1985. In which she explains the strategies used by Sor Juana to answer the accusations by playing with her expected female weakness.

¹⁹ To know more about Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz, it is possible to visit http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portales/sor_juana_ines_de_la_cruz/ Last accessed August 3, 2018. The website is dedicated entirely to her life, her works and the studies made about her, under the direction of the greatest specialist of this author in México: Margo Glantz.

Today, we can find organizations like Catholics for Choice²⁰ or, in Latin America, *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir*²¹. They fight, among other things, for a world where everyone has equal and affordable access to reproductive healthcare, such as legal abortion services and contraception. They seek “to shape and advance sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women’s well-being and respect and affirm the capacity of women and men to make moral decisions about their lives” (Catholics for Choice 2005-2018).

Thus, the decision not to include Catholicism in my analysis is pragmatic and not for lack of examples. Moreover, it does not imply any kind of judgement on whether or not this form of Christianity can be an instrument for the empowerment of women or of its compatibility with feminism.

Another reason comes from personal experience. Although I was born and raised in a predominantly Catholic environment, during my formative years neither my family nor I were particularly religious or active members of the Church. During my late teenage years and adulthood, my first close experiences with religious practice came not from Catholicism but from what in Latin America fell under the umbrella denomination of Christian Churches, which actually, depending on their different affiliations, are Evangelicals, Charismatics or Pentecostals. Nevertheless, they all seem too restrictive and patriarchal to me, and so I never officially affiliated with any of them.

In the course of my last job in Colombia in Bogotá’s city Council, I met different members, principally women, of the CGMJCI and its political party, MIRA. Although I knew about their religious affiliation, getting to know them changed some of my perceptions. Their political party was and still is the only one that uses the zipper system in Colombia to set up their close electoral lists. This kind of political practice grants and guarantees equal participation for men and women²². The party actually states, “... for the

²⁰ In the United States <http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/> Last Accessed August 4, 2018.

²¹ In some Latin American countries: Mexico: <https://catolicasmexico.org/ns/> Argentina: <http://catolicas.org.ar/> and Colombia <https://cddcolombia.org/> Last Accessed August 4, 2018.

²² This is a commonly known practice of this political Party in Colombia. Their Statutes only state that the lists, both for internal choosing and for public elections, should guarantee at least 30% participation of one of the two genders (See articles 67 and 72 of their Statutes at <https://partidomira.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Estatutos-1-Noviembre-de-2016-Vigentes.pdf> Last accessed September 10, 2018). Nevertheless, one of their members, former member of the House of Representatives and today Senator, Ana Paola Agudelo said on a public interview on 24 march 2018, “El sistema cremallera consiste precisamente en que las listas vayan conformadas por hombre, mujer, hombre de manera alterna... aunque no es una ley nosotros si lo implementamos. Creo que esto ha sido uno de los ejercicios más positivos... actualmente por ejemplo en la Cámara [de Representantes] somos dos mujeres y un hombre, y los electos para Senado son dos mujeres y un hombre, y en la Cámara queda una mujer, que era la que encabezaba la lista.” [The zipper system consists precisely in that the lists are formed by man, woman, man alternately ... although it is not a law, we implement it. I think this has been one of the most positive exercises ... currently for example in the House [of

Party, politics is incomplete without the participation of women”²³ (MIRA 2017). In application of this system, there was one councilwoman and one councilman representing the Party at Bogotá’s city Council. The people that worked for them were mainly women. They never preached or tried to evangelize, and in the debates of the different bills, they never brought to the forefront religious arguments in order to argue in favour or against any particular project. They presented bills in favour of the rights of women (like the one asking for parity in public office) and made several campaigns against gender and domestic violence. By the end of the three years working in City Council, I had met several members of both the Church and the Party and even made friends with some of them. This experience made me re-evaluate my assumptions that all Christian Churches and affiliations were sexist and patriarchal, but my doubts on the matter remained personal.

It was only after having discovered Mary Astell’s works and her utopian Proposal for a Religious retirement where women could develop their God-given reason, that I considered the possibility of researching the positive relation between religion and women; of exploring, in other words, how Christianity could be a source and instrument of empowerment for women. Astell did not formulate her feminist views in spite of her religious and political beliefs, but precisely thanks to them. In the words of Hilda L. Smith, “I contend that Astell is drawn to a critique of women’s intellectual and familial status precisely because her royalist and Anglican loyalties put her in direct conflict with the values and actions of mid-century revolutionaries” (2007, 194)²⁴.

The two elements which have inspired this dissertation, the CGMJCI and Mary Astell’s works –soon joined by Mary Wollstonecraft’s reflections-, belong to the protestant tradition, although they seem, both in time and in content, extremely distant from one another. In analysing Astell’s and Wollstonecraft’s legacies and their impact on the development of feminist consciousness as well as the changes within the Christian tradition, I found that religious women had played important roles in the first women’s movements both in England and the United States. I also discovered that women were among the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement in the United States, the one that later

Representatives] we are two women and one man, and the elected for Senate are two women and one man, and in the House [of Representatives] there is a woman, who was the head of the list.] (Agudelo 2018). This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

²³ “...para el Partido, la política está incompleta sin la participación de la Mujer”. This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

²⁴ With a similar perspective, see also Achinstein, Sharon. "Mary Astell, Religion, and Feminism: Texts in Motion."...

expanded throughout Latin America and gave birth to many Protestant Churches, among which precisely the CGMJCI. Thus, I was able to find a Golden thread between the two elements that first inspired my research, but not a way to link them with cases from the Catholic tradition. Consequently, I decided to focus on the Protestant one, recognizing, in any case, that a further or more ample research can include new examples and experiences.

Drawing from these statements, and in line with gender studies methodologies, I tried to make my positionality on the matter clear. In doing so, I intend to accomplish the demands made by several feminists and gender studies theorists, among which Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway, who already in the 1980s, debated the presumed neutrality of scientific research, calling for a researcher who could not be invisible or the “anonymous voice of authority”, but “a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests” (Harding 1987, 9). A researcher who recognizes her own partiality and positionality, who has and embraces “the view from a body, always complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.” (Haraway 1988, 589).

Positionality does not mean bias, nor does it mean relativism, it is a way of recognizing one’s own way of being in the world and how it influences the research. By doing so, objectivity is not damaged but enhanced, because the idea of neutrality, of the observer from above, is left behind in favour of fairness and honesty, of putting on the table one’s own perceptions and convictions, and recognizing that they are part of the research (Harding 1992).

1.1. Starting Points and Connecting Bridges: Weaving the Golden Thread

Each chapter has a particular methodology. The second chapter focuses on the literary analysis of the works of Astell and Wollstonecraft, which includes historical contextualization and intertextual analysis, in line with the recent debates raised amongst women’s scholarship regarding past relations between women and religion. In these debates, different scholars pose how it was due to their religious beliefs and not in spite of them that women questioned their position in society and demanded changes²⁵. The third chapter, which serves as a bridge between the second and the fourth, consists mainly

²⁵ See, among others, the works cited in the present dissertation by Ruth Perry, Hilda Smith, Sarah Apetrei, Patricia Springborg, Karen Detlefsen, Barbara Taylor, Patricia Howell Michaelson and Kim Jacobs-Beck.

on the review of historical secondary sources with specific reference to the role religious women played in the formation of the first women's movement, as well as the part women had in the foundation of new Christian denominations in the early twentieth century. The fourth chapter, dedicated to the anthropological case study, shows the result of the fieldwork done in the CGMJC, which implied the use of anthropological and ethnographic tools.

Taking on account the starting points explained earlier, i.e., on the one hand Astell and Wollstonecraft, and on the other the CGMJC; this section will first explain the methodology used in their respective cases, and then the one used for the points of connection.

1.1.1. The Utopian projects of Astell and Wollstonecraft

Anne K. Mellor in her article "On feminist Utopias", in which she analyses feminist utopian fiction of the twentieth century, states that feminist thinking is fundamentally utopian, because a gender-free society has never existed.

Feminist theory is inherently utopian. Feminist theory is grounded on the assumption of gender equality, a social equality between the sexes which has never existed in the historical past. ...no substantiated anthropological or archeological evidence has been found to support the historical existence of a matriarchal society. Those seeking a viable model of a non-sexist society must therefore look to the future; their model must be constructed first as a utopia, as a heuristic fiction. Feminist thinking, as it seeks to analyze and eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender, inevitably posits a gender-free alternative world that does not now exist but which is possible within historical time and space. (Mellor 1982, 243)

As such, it comes as no surprise that female writers appropriated the genre, adapting it to their needs and expectations, in order to imagine and propose different worlds from the feminine and feminist perspectives. In this regard, Rita Monticelli writes, "If utopia, as a literary genre, intends to explore different possibilities of reality, criticizing the existing one, the appropriation of this genre by female writers... becomes a way to create a space for the deconstruction and reconstruction of the feminine, and its functions within the social and symbolic order"²⁶ (2003, 709).

²⁶ The original is in Italian. "Se l'utopia come genere letterario intende esplorare diverse possibilità del reale, criticando l'esistente, l'appropriazione da parte delle scrittrici di questo genere... diviene un mezzo per creare uno spazio di decostruzione e ricostruzione del femminile, e delle sue funzioni all'interno dell'ordine sociale e simbolico". This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

Thus, if one identifies hope and the desire for a better life as the defining characteristic of utopia, as Fátima Vieira does (2010), it is possible to affirm that from the seventeenth century onwards women have engaged in utopian writing in one way or another²⁷. Kate Lilley identifies “The Fifth Monarchist, Mary Cary, and the Anglican Tory, Mary Astell, [as representatives] of these two strands [radical sectarians and conservatives] of women’s participation in utopian writing through religious discourse” (1992, 106).

The fact that religious discourse and utopian writing could go hand and hand goes back to the fact that utopianism has its bases in the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as in the Hellenic or Greek one. For Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel the first is the stronger and more continuous of the two,

A natural history of paradises of the Judaic and Christian religion assembles some of the intellectual and emotional materials that accumulated in European society and constituted an ever-growing storehouse in the culture. Paradise in its Judeo-Christian forms has to be accepted as the deepest archaeological layer of Western utopia, active in the unconscious of large segments of the population...

Though utopia properly remains a creation of the World of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the vision of the two paradises (Eden and the World to Come), of the Days of the Messiah, and of the millennium have so tenacious a hold on Western consciousness that they are a constant presence –in multiple variations- in all subsequent utopian thought (Manuel and Manuel 1979, 33).

The difference between utopia and its Judeo-Christian roots is that the former includes the role of individuals in the process of achieving the future better life (Vieira 2010). Utopia is not a paradise that comes after death, but a better society that involves the ongoing effort of all its members.

Mary Cary was born around 1621 but her date of death is not known. She was a member of the Fifth Monarchists, an extreme puritan sect active during the Interregnum. Their name comes “from their belief that the time of the fifth monarchy was at hand—that is, the monarchy that... should succeed the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, and Roman monarchies and during which Christ should reign on earth with his saints for 1,000 years” (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018). She wrote approximately from 1648 to 1653, and from

²⁷ Some would affirm that *The Book of the City of Ladies*, written by Christine de Pisan (c.1364-1430) in 1405 – more than a century before Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516)–, can be considered an example of utopian writing, in which the world from a female perspective and the centrality of education express the desire for a better world. Although this book was written before the term utopia even existed, it does not mean that it cannot be considered utopian because “although he invented the word utopia, More did not invent utopianism, which has at its core the desire for a better life” (Vieira 2010, 6).

1650 onward under the name of Mary Rande. As a member of the Fifth Monarchists and one of its leading representatives, Cary believed in the eschatological²⁸ idea that Christ would soon return to earth in order “to rule over a new order alongside his elect” and that the “arrival of Christ’s Fifth Monarchy would coincide with the dissolution of the state church” (Gillespie 2011, 81. 86). This explains why her writings announced the imminent arrival of Christ and demanded reformations in England in order turn it into a worthy nation.

In her 1653 *Twelve Humble Proposals To the Supreme Governors of the Three Nations now assembled at Westminster*, Cary, invoking the reign of Christ as near “either immediately in his own person, or mediately by his Saints” (as cited by Lilley 1992, 102), made a series of proposals concerning tax reformation, public and unrestricted preaching, simplification of the law, public ownership of land and relief for the poor, among others. She did not just make demands but offered ways of taking them to practice. With regards of the poor, she demanded the government to take care of them and for it to happen she proposed “raising money by imposing a tax of three pence on all inland letters and a tax for sealing every contract and bargain” (Schwoerer 1998, 67)

In 1651 she had published *The Little Horns Doom and Downfall* followed by *A New and More Exact Mappe of New Jerusalems Glory*²⁹, where she claimed a prophetic personal voice guided by the voices in heaven. She envisioned a better world dependant of one’s choice to be among the saints, whom she identified, according to Lilley, with the members of different sects such as the “Roundhead, Puritans, Independents, Presbiterians, Anabaptists, Sectaries, Precisians, and what not” (as cited by Lilley 1992, 110). For Cary the aforementioned choice was available to all, with no distinction of rank or sex, “in the space of her writing, utopia is figured as present possibility and collective identity, which also brings with it a dismantling of social hierarchy and gender inequality” (Lilley 1992, 111).

Cary, moving from the traditional idea that the Church is the bride of Christ³⁰, claims “...that which is given to the Husband, the wife must partake of... the Saints of

²⁸ One of the foundational ideas of Christianity is that of the Eschaton, i.e., the final event of the divine plan, which in the most known version today means the return of Jesus Christ, but for some others meant not only His return but also His reign on earth for a thousand years. This reign is what is known as the idea of a Millennium or the Days of the Messiah.

²⁹ The track complete title is *A New and More Exact Mappe of New Jerusalems Glory when Jesus Christ and his Saints with him shall Reign on Earth a Thousand Years, and Possess all Kingdoms*.

³⁰ One analogy that is present in Christian tradition is that of believing that the Church is the bride of Christ, which is based in different verses of the new testament, that compare the situation of women and men with that of the Church with Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul tells to those he help convert: “I am jealous for you with a

Christ are the members of Christ, they are the Lamb's wife: and having given himself unto them, he will not withhold anything that is from them..." (as cited by Lilley 1992, 111). According to Lilley, with this kind of statements Cary "revalues and privileges the 'feminine'... [offering] to extend the benefits of her own position to men, so that they too may become brides of Christ" (1992, 111). However, this new value of the feminine that Lilley sees in Cary's work, extending the role of the wifely position with respect to God and Christ to all Saints, not just to the Church as an organization and not just to women, does not, in my view, re-evaluate the position of women in general. What Cary does is putting every Saint in a position of submission in regards of God, a submission that is implied, precisely, by their position as 'wife', thus, under the command of Christ that functions as God. It is true that Cary claims, "that which is given to the Husband, the wife must partake of", but it is the husband that has the power to give or withhold, as can be read in the next sentence "he will not withhold anything that it is his from them"; the wife just submits and receives, although justice demands she be given all that is his.

Unlike Cary, Mary Astell was a High Anglican Tory, thus belonging to what we might call today "the *establishment*". Precisely because she belonged to the Church of England and did not have to defend herself or her fellow Anglicans from persecution or to justify her beliefs, as women from the dissenting groups had to do³¹, Astell was able to focus on the status of women and to criticize their devaluated and degraded condition. Ruth Perry (1986) considers Astell as the first English feminist while Hilda Smith describes her as "first and foremost a feminist intellectual" (2007, 196). This is the reason why my research starts with Astell, because based on the Cartesian dualism of body and soul, Astell was able to raise the idea of equality of men and women under God. The equality she posed was based on the sexless mind and soul, which, if both men and women

godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." And in Ephesians 5:22-24 "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." This last verse has been used to justify the submission of women to men, but it also means that, as a whole, the Church must submit to Christ.

³¹ "...sectarian and Leveller women argued for their public voice either as Quaker preachers or as pamphleteers addressing Parliament as citizens of England. They did not, however, utilize that standing to critique the power relations of a patriarchal society... women spoke up in their congregations and Quaker women resisted the opposition of some male members of the Society of Friends to either restrict or shut down the women's meetings, they failed to question these same men's authority within the family. And, as vessels of Christ's word, rather than as overt spokeswomen for their sex, their voices were disembodied and removed from both their personal identity and the identity of women generally. Separatist women thus represented strong examples of women's public and private religious roles, but they did not use their pulpit or congregational representation to press for greater power for women within the family or society at large." (H. L. Smith 2007, 202-203).

were to fulfil their duty of developing their God-given reason, then demanded an education of quality for both of them.

Astell, through the use of Christian principles and Cartesian philosophy, was able to argue for the equality and full humanity of women. She was the first to take for granted the fact the women were educable (Perry 1986) and from there she formed a whole argument in defence of their chance of an education which is contained in her first work *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, published in 1694 followed by a second part published in 1697. Hence, for me Astell marks a breaking point and a landmark in the relation between Christianity and women. That is why I decided to start my dissertation by analysing her work.

A Serious Proposal to the Ladies is part of the utopian feminist tradition (Lilley 1992; Johns 2010). In it, Astell proposes a religious retirement for women, specifically the Ladies, in which, away from the “Pomps and Pageantry of the world” (SPL Part I, 74), they would learn the rightful use of their reason and the tenants of Christianity. As a retirement, *A Serious Proposal* can be considered part of the long tradition of feminist utopia that champions separatism as a way for women to achieve full humanity and subjectivity³². But Astell does not pretend for women to remain enclosed in the retirement, but for them to return to the world once they had acquired sufficient and solid knowledge. At their return from the religious retirement women would have had learned the instruments to be better wives, better mothers and a rightful example for their neighbours. Hannah Smith (2007) sees Astell’s project as part of the movement for the reformation of manners, in which women were of great importance not only because they were considered to be “easy prey” for the dissenters’ sects but, more importantly, because they, as the ones in charge of children, were responsible of transmitting the right Christian values.

Astell not only champions an equality feminism³³, she also puts great value in traits traditionally associated with women such as friendship and community (Detlefsen 2017). In Astell’s religious retirement, Ladies would learn by the example of others, “every one who comes under this holy Roof may be such an amiable, such a charming

³² For a detailed analysis of the importance of separatism in feminist utopian writing see Monticelli, Rita. 2003. *Utopia e Feminismo*...

³³ As I explain in chapter 2, I agree with Detlefsen when she differentiates between two types of feminism in Astell’s work, one that she identifies as equality feminism, that is, one that defends the intrinsic equality between men and women based on the sexless mind and, as such, demands for a better education for women; and a second feminism “grounded in the recognition of the value —sometimes even the superiority—of traits typically associated with women”, like friendship or the importance of community (2017, 195).

Creature, what faults they bring with them shall be corrected by sweetness not severity; by friendly Admonitions, not magisterial Reproofs; piety shall not be roughly impos'd, but wisely insinuated by a perpetual Display of the Beauties of Religion in exemplary Conversation..." (SPL Part I, 89), and be able to form true friendships, "besides that holy emulation which a continual view of the brightest and most exemplary Lives will excite in us; we shall have the opportunity of contracting the purest and noblest Friendship" (98).

Astell's proposal is highly pragmatic, she even exposes a way of financing the endeavour. In Part II, when she realises that it may not be possible to establish her retirement, Astell decides to explain her method of thinking, highly influenced by the works of Port Royal theorists, namely, Antoine Arnauld³⁴, as a way of giving women tools to develop their God-given reason in the outside world (Broad 2007)³⁵. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Hilda Smith "in both parts, [Astell's] aim remains constant: to produce a faithful Christian who will further Christ's cause. Such a cause is best furthered by a believer who accepts the principles of religion not through memorization of the catechism or adhering blindly to the words of husbands or ministers, but through personal study and rigorous thought grounded in philosophical and ethical principles, as well as serious scrutiny of the scriptures and theology" (2007, 197).

This pragmatism is what makes Detlefsen (2017) qualified Astell's proposal as a non-ideal theory, that is, one that identifies problems, diagnoses their causes and formulates practical solutions. In Mellor's classification Astell's religious retirement would be part of what she defines as concrete utopias, i.e., one that "has a practical social purpose" (1982, 242). It is also the reason why Alessa Johns (2010) considers it in her analysis of process-oriented feminist utopia; in addition to its pragmatic nature, Astell's proposal, as I show in chapter II, has education at its centre, where human nature is improvable, and change can be achieved gradually.

These characteristics, pragmatism, education oriented, malleable human nature, and gradualist approach to change, are also present in Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication*

³⁴ Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694) was a theologian and a philosopher from Port-Royal School. He joined the solitaires of Port-Royal around 1640. He co-authored, along with Pierre Nicole, *La Logique ou l'Art de penser* (Logic or the Art of Thinking). He also defended Jansen against the charges of Heresy made by the Catholic church. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2017)

³⁵ "Although Astell's original work was well received, her central proposal—the founding of an academy or a "religious retirement" for single gentlewomen—failed to find active support. Astell wrote this second work in order to persuade women to improve their minds through their own efforts, till a seminary could be established" (Broad 2007, 167).

of the Right of Woman (1792), probably her best-known work, in which she proposes a national co-educational system for boys and girls, in the same spaces and with the same content. This co-education would result in better relations between the sexes, based on reason and not on passions. It would make women better wives, mothers and citizens and, as result, would improve the world at large. Although apparently appearing as different projects, from women that were on opposite sides of the political spectrum, both Astell and Wollstonecraft utopian plans have at their base strong Christian values.

Wollstonecraft is an iconic figure of western feminism. Both her work and her life -sometimes more the latter than the former³⁶-, have been studied extensively and in dept. She was influenced by the American and French revolutions, as well as by ideas of the rational dissenters. Chris Jones (2002) describes Wollstonecraft as a republican and we would not be wrong in stating that she and the conservative Tory Astell were on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

Wollstonecraft's political influences have been widely studied, however her Christian faith has been mainly set aside by her readers and scholarship. This dismissiveness can be trace back to *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), published by William Godwin shortly after Wollstonecraft's death in 1797. In it, Godwin presented a picture of Wollstonecraft as not particularly religious, drawn to God emotionally and not rationally (Taylor 2002, 2003; Mellor, 2002; Jacob-Becks 2012).

Nonetheless, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is infused by her religious beliefs. As I show in chapter II, the central argument of the book is that women, in the same way as men, have been endowed by God with reason. Consequently, if men and women are to rightly exercise their God-given reason, they need access to the same kind of education. The centrality of reason in Wollstonecraft's argument can be trace back to the rational Dissenters idea of "private reason judgement as the foundation of true religion" (Taylor 2003, 104) and linked to Richard Price's sermons in which reason was the way to God and virtue (Jacobs-Beck 2012). Rational Dissenters' theology was particularly influenced by the philosophical theories of the Cambridge Platonists (Taylor

³⁶ "...up until the last quarter-century Wollstonecraft's life has been read much more closely than her writing, which has sometimes seemed a mere pretext for telling and retelling her personal story. Yet now that her work too has at last received the attention it deserves there is a sense in which she seems to offer the present too much – both an emotional and sexual history whose notoriety has inhibited access to the writing, and a body of work at once so discursively emphatic and elusive that it upsets the tidy categorizations and standard narratives of social, political, and cultural history" (Kaplan 2002, 247).

2003); who also had been highly influential, a century earlier, in Astell's work (Perry 1986; Apetrei 2010).

Thus, recovering Wollstonecraft's Christian foundations is a way of weaving the Golden Thread between her and Astell, whom, unfortunately, was "barely remembered by Wollstonecraft's day" (Taylor 2003, 110). It is then a work on feminist genealogy, and a way of showing how Christian principles and values can be appropriated and used by people on different points of the political spectrum, not being exclusively a tool or characteristic of the conservative side.

1.1.2. A Contemporary Church lead by a Woman

My other starting point is the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International (CGMJCI). The Church was founded in 1972 in Colombia, under the name *Iglesia de Dios Ministerial de Jesucristo* (adding years later the word *Internacional*), in a time were Catholicism was the sanctioned religion of the country, constitutionally protected as that of the nation. Articles 38 and 40 of 1886's Constitution³⁷ stated,

Artículo 38.- La Religión Católica, Apostólica, Romana, es la de la Nación; los Poderes públicos la protegerán y harán que sea respetada como esencial elemento del orden social.

Se entiende que la Iglesia Católica no es ni será oficial, y conservará su independencia.

Artículo 40.- Es permitido el ejercicio de todos los cultos que no sean contrarios a la moral cristiana ni a las leyes.

*Los actos contrarios a la moral cristiana o subversivos del orden público, que se ejecuten con ocasión o pretexto del ejercicio de un culto, quedan sometidos al derecho común.*³⁸

Although article 39 of the same Constitution stated that no one would be disturbed for their religious opinion³⁹, in practice the Catholic Church enjoyed a favoured place in

³⁷ Because it is an official document, I have decided to keep it and all other official documents, i.e., the Colombian Political Constitution of 1991, Laws, etc., in its original language with a translation as a footnote. For other references and documents, such as books and interviews, I will include them in English with their transcription in the original language as a footnote.

³⁸ "Article 38. The Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church is that of the Nation; the public powers will protect It and make sure It is respected as an essential element of the social order. It is understood that the Catholic Church is not and will not be official, and that it will preserve its independence.

Article 40. The exercise of all other cults is allowed as long as they are not contrary to Christian morals or laws. Acts contrary to Christian morals or subversives of public order, executed on the occasion or under pretext of the exercise of a cult, are subject to common law."

This and any other translation of Colombian legal material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

³⁹ Artículo 39. Nadie será molestado por razón de sus opiniones religiosas, ni compelido por las autoridades a profesar creencias ni a observar prácticas contrarias a su conciencia. [Article 39. No one will be disturbed because of their religious opinions, nor compelled by the authorities to profess beliefs or observe practices contrary to their conscience.]

society. Article 41 of the Constitution stated that public education was to be organized and directed according to the parameters of the Catholic Church⁴⁰, a mandate that was kept in the Concordat signed between Colombia and the Vatican in 1887 and replicated in the Decree 544 of 1888⁴¹. The Catholic Church also had control of many aspects of social and political life thanks to the Concordat and additional accords signed between the State and the Vatican, including civil records and marriage (Levine 1981)⁴². Thus, as stated by William Mauricio Beltrán, “Catholicism was constituted as a central element of the Colombian identity and the Catholic Church functioned as a powerful mechanism of domination, social control and political mobilization”⁴³ (2013, 19).

It would take until the National Constituent Assembly of 1991 and its consequent new Political Constitution for Colombia to recognize freedom of religion as a Constitutional Right, in the following terms,

Artículo 19. Se garantiza la libertad de cultos. Toda persona tiene derecho a profesar libremente su religión y a difundirla en forma individual o colectiva.

*Todas las confesiones religiosas e iglesias son igualmente libres ante la ley.*⁴⁴

Different Christian denominations that had been founded in Colombia during the twentieth century, influenced by missionaries from the United States (among which Pentecostals, Charismatics, Evangelicals, etc.), played a fundamental role in the recognition of freedom of religion as a fundamental constitutional right in Colombia (Beltrán 2013).

⁴⁰ Artículo 41.- La educación pública será organizada y dirigida en concordancia con la Religión Católica. La instrucción primaria costeadada con fondos públicos, será gratuita y no obligatoria.

[Article 41.- Public education will be organized and directed in accordance with the Catholic Religion.

The primary instruction paid for with public funds will be free and not mandatory.]

⁴¹ This Decree was to regulate teaching and religious practices in public schools. Its first article stated, “*en todas las Escuelas oficiales, así primarias como normales, se enseñará la Religión Católica*” [Catholic religion will be taught in all official schools, both primary and teacher training].

⁴² “The Church also received the predominant role in registering births, with parish records having preference over civil records. In addition, the management of death was placed in Church hands, as cemeteries were turned over to the ecclesiastical authorities.

Marriage, another major step in the life cycle, was also placed firmly under Church control. Civil divorce did not exist, and civil marriage for baptized Catholics was made contingent on a public declaration of abandonment of the faith... the Church wields broad civil powers in the more than 60% of Colombia's area designated as "mission territories." There, an agreement made in 1953 gave the missionary orders extensive control over education as well as broad civil authority.” (Levine 1981, 70-71)

⁴³ The original is in Spanish: “el catolicismo se constituyó en elemento central de la identidad colombiana y la Iglesia católica funcionó como un poderoso mecanismo de dominación, control social y movilización política.” This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

⁴⁴ “Article 19. The freedom of cults is guaranteed. Everyone has the right to freely profess their religion and to spread it individually or collectively.

All religious denominations and churches are equally free before the law.”

The CGMJCI is one of those Churches that came about due to the influence of American⁴⁵ missionaries in Latin America. In its web site, the CGMJCI recognizes the American Pentecostal movement of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as one of its foundations (Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International 2017).

According to the autobiography of its religious leader, María Luisa Piraquive, the Church was founded by her and her husband in 1972 because God spoke to her and told them⁴⁶, “you have to be independent from all other congregations, because you cannot submit to human laws and ordinances, my spirit will guide you, direct you and teach you all things”⁴⁷ (2017, 47). According to Piraquive, although God gave ministry to both of them, it was only until her husband’s death in 1996, that women, including her, have started preaching in the Church. Before that, women’s spiritual duties, including those of Piraquive, were limited to ministering the different gifts, mainly, prophesy and healing.

In her autobiography, Piraquive refers to women preaching as one of the Holy Spirit revelations to her “The Holy Spirit always told me that He was supporting me, that I had a Ministry, that He would use women as well as men and that this would be proven in a not too distant time”⁴⁸ (2017, 100). One of the women I interviewed during my fieldwork, sister Adriana, referred to me those same promises and told me that the important role that women enjoy today in the CGMJCI started when Piraquive took control of the Church after her husband’s death,

*The starting point of what is really the role of women in the Church, I could say it was the moment God gave the reins to Sister Maria Luisa, with the departure of Brother Luis. That is the moment in which God materializes those promises that he had made, and she has been the first example of the role of women in the church, which is the same as man. It is not more, it is not less, it is the same.*⁴⁹

⁴⁵ In Spanish I refuse to use the Word *americanos* to refer to United States citizens, because America is the name of the whole continent not just of their country. Instead, at least in Latin America, we tend to call them *estadounidenses*. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a word in the English language to refer to United States citizens other than Americans.

⁴⁶ As I explain in chapters III and IV, Pentecostals believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and certain gifts from God, in virtue of which they believe that God directly speaks to some of them through dreams, visions and prophesies (Jacobsen 2006). The CGMJCI is part of this tradition and the spiritual leader believes that God speaks to her and that she is blessed, among others, with the gift of prophesy (Piraquive de Moreno 2017).

⁴⁷ The original is in Spanish: “tienen que ser independientes de las demás congregaciones porque vosotros no podéis someteros a leyes y ordenanzas humanas, mi espíritu los guiará, los dirigirá y les enseñará todas las cosas”. This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

⁴⁸ “El Espíritu Santo siempre me decía que me estaría respaldando, que yo tenía Ministerio, que Él usaría a las mujeres igual que a los varones y que esto me lo estaría comprobando en un tiempo no muy lejano”.

⁴⁹ “Digamos que la partida de lo que en verdad es el rol de la mujer en la iglesia yo podría decir que fue a partir de que Dios le da las riendas a la hermana María Luisa, con la partida del hermano Luis. Ese es el momento en que Dios materializa esas promesas que había hecho y ella ha sido el primer ejemplo de ese rol de la mujer en la iglesia, que es igual que el hombre. No es más no es menos, es igual.”

This evolution of the role of women could be considered as part of what Daphne Hampson identifies as the *Kairos* approach, according to which God is involved in history in a way that God creates the opportune situation for new realities, such as, precisely, women preaching. This approach “allows it to be said that the past has not been at fault; it is simply that God moves with humanity into a new age” (Hampson 1990, 23).

As I show in chapter IV, the *Kairos* approach seems to be present in several aspects of the CGMJCI, because the Church depends not only on the Bible, but on revelation and prophesy. In this, it seems to share some characteristics with the Quakers, at least the early ones, who adapted their beliefs and practices according to the revelations they received (Michaelson 1993; Broad and Green 2009).

In 2000 the CGMJCI founded a political party in Colombia called MIRA⁵⁰. From the beginning, when the party was established by Piraquive’s own daughter and Carlos Eduardo Baena, the idea of gender parity has been one of its main principles, at least among men and women. They have always used the zipper system for conforming their electoral lists, and part of their political programme is the defence of women rights, at least those relative to work and to a life free from violence.

My fieldwork with this Church started in February 2018, when I started to attend Church meetings, what they call ‘teachings’⁵¹, for over a month every Sunday. The Church I attended is located in Milan, Italy, and has a male preacher. During my visits to that temple I practiced participant observation⁵², entering in conversation with different members of the Church, the pastor and his wife. I also took notes of the sermons and the proceedings. I even participated in the ‘ritual’ of prophesy, in which every person that is new to the Church, i.e., every newcomer, is invited, at the end of the meeting, to hear from one the members of the Church that has been gifted with the gift of prophesy what is it that God has in store for her. This invitation is also extended to Church members, but

⁵⁰ Originally the acronym stood for *Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta* [Independent Movement for Absolute Renovation]. According to their website today it stands for *Movimiento Internacional por la Renovación Absoluta* [International Movement for Absolute Renovation]. (MIRA 2015).

⁵¹ The CGMJCI has different types of meetings. One is ‘Teaching’, in which the pastor gives his/her sermon. The other is ‘Bible Study’, in which Sister María Luisa gives what they consider to be the right interpretation of the Bible to the congregation, what they call ‘doctrine’. This is done through the use of videos of Piraquive preaching in different churches around the world. The last type is ‘Worship’, during which people meet in church in order to, precisely, worship God, everyone in its own style and way, with some collective worship in the beginning and in the end. Although during my “official” fieldwork I only attended Teaching meetings, I had had the chance to attend the other two types with some friends that belong to this Church on 2016, before leaving Colombia.

⁵² According to José Yuni, María Rita Ciucci y Claudio Urbano, participant observation “allows the researcher to know how the actors act and how they interpret, what are they values, their belief and what meaning they give to their actions”. [le permite conocer al investigador cómo actúan y cómo interpretan, cuáles son los valores, las creencias y el sentido que le otorgan a sus acciones los actores]. (2014, 185).

always giving priority to newcomers. These different experiences during the participant observation helped me to discern the interactions between the members of the Church and the value they give to Church's teaching and to its spiritual leader.

The participant observation was not easy on a personal level. From the moment I stepped into the Church, because it is such a small congregation, different members, including the pastor, came to me and asked me why I was there and how I got to know of the Church. I made clear from the beginning that I was there to conduct fieldwork for my master dissertation, but I must admit that I never stated that I was not an official member of the Church. I took the conscious decision of being ambiguous. I told them that I knew the Church because of my former job at Bogotá's city council where I had had the opportunity to meet members of both MIRA, the political party, and the CGMJCI. I did not want to give them the impression that I was a parishioner, but also did not want them to feel as mere objects of my research. I felt that I was walking on a thin line between not being disrespectful of their belief system and actually being deceptive, something that I tried to avoid at all cost. I had in my favour, or disadvantage, the fact that I more or less know my way with a Bible and that, because I had already attended other Evangelical and Pentecostal services in the past, both in this Church and in others, I knew that they referred to one another as brother and sister. I did not take an active role in any of the meetings and kept to myself my own belief system which, although is part of the Christian tradition, does not align itself with that of the CGMJCI.

Apart from the participant observation, in April, after having spent over a month amongst them, I did a series of semi-structured individual interviews to nine members of the Church, eight women and one man, and a discussion group. All the women I interviewed *minister* gifts from the Holy Spirit (prophesy, healing and/or laying of hand), and as such hold important roles within the Church. The man I interviewed is the husband of one of them. My goal with the individual interviews was to be able to create a meta-narrative of what it meant for these women to be members of this particular Church. I wanted to be able to construct, at least in part, some resemblance of a life narrative from their personal experiences. Life narratives allow for the identification of implicit processes in the formation of subjectivity and community; it "facilitates knowledge about

the relationship of subjectivity with social institutions, their imaginaries and symbolic representations”⁵³ (Puyana V. and Barreto G. 1994, 185-186).

Given the fact that my interest in this Church is not the Church in itself, but how belonging to it has enabled women to find their voices and has empowered them both in the public and private spheres, life narratives seem like a particularly useful tool. They refer in particular to the individual, favouring at the same time “the compression of individual dynamics in their interaction with their familiar and socio-historical environment”, and “allows [you] to know and confer meaning to the cultural context of the people with whom you work, understand their subjectivity” (Puyana V. and Barreto G. 1994, 186).

On the other hand, the discussion group, done with the women I had previously interviewed as well as with the husbands of two of them, served as a tool for identifying the meaning Church members gave to categories such as women and empowerment, as well as to understand their position regarding issues like abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

For the latter, that is, the official position of the CGMJCI and its political party on “controversial” issues such as abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, I have been following several public members of the Party, the Church and the Party itself on social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter. This also helped me to identify the instruments they use for implementing women’s rights and to achieve women’s empowerment. I decided to follow this approach because, although the Party and its members are not particularly vocal about the aforementioned issues or the so called “gender ideology”, they do have a mostly conservative stand on the matter that let itself show precisely on their social media. I also reviewed the Church and the Party websites in search of their history and official declarations.

Another source that played an important part in my research was Piraquive’s autobiography, called *Vivencias*. In it, Piraquive not only tells her life story, but also the history of the CGMJCI. The book is full of revelations, prophecies, and miracles, as one would expect from a Pentecostal’s account. In the analysis of it, apart from the traditional theories of Georges Gusdorf and Phillippe Lejeune; I adopt, among others, the approach of Ana Teresa Torres (2003), who tells us that there cannot be a complete identification between the writer’s self (or author) and the writer, due to fact that writing is always

⁵³ Originally in Spanish. “facilita el conocimiento acerca de la relación de la subjetividad con las instituciones sociales, sus imaginarios y representaciones simbólicas”. This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

mediated by discourse and is subject to interpretations by the reader. I also work with Teresa del Valle's analysis on how an autobiography is elaborated, because Piraquive's account follows mainly what Del Valle calls milestones, that is, "those decisions, experiences, that when remembered constitute a significant reference"⁵⁴ (1995, 285). In Piraquive's case, the milestones are essentially the revelations from God either to her or to other members of the Church, about the foundation and development of the CGMJCI, her own life and the life of others.

This chapter also includes a description of Colombia's context as well as of how different Protestant denominations expanded from the United States to Latin America, based on historical, sociological and anthropological studies made on the matter.

All of these research instruments allowed me to discover how the CGMJCI and its members conceive both Christianity and the empowerment of women. It also allowed me to understand, up to some extent, the principles of their faith and how those principles have helped women to find their voices. However, my research also led me to find and recognize the limits of these approaches, because they leave outside some fundamental parts of the empowerment of women, like body autonomy or the refusal of fixed gender roles.

1.1.3. Points of Connection

When I started this research, I had the idea that, contrary to popular belief, Christianity could actually be a tool for the empowerment of women. My starting points were, on the one hand the works of Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft and on the other some anecdotal evidences and personal experiences regarding the CGMJCI. However, these two examples did not seem like enough proof to substantiate my hypothesis. In addition, because of the great distance between them in every aspect, whether it be temporal, spatial or in the way they approach Christianity, it did not seem possible for me to take just these two cases as the object of my study. Thus, I decided to look for and include other instances where I could find a positive relation between women and Christianity, one that had as a result the vindication of women's rights and the recognition of their subjectivity. I quested after a substantial enough sample to be able to create a dialogue on the matter. I also wanted to weave a golden thread among the different cases,

⁵⁴ Originally in Spanish. "Aquellas decisiones, vivencias, que al recordarlas se constituyen en una referencia significativa". This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

that is, a connection between them that would allow me to put all of the cases in a dialectic relation and to obtain some useful new points of reflection. Appropriating the words of Ruether, I sought for a pattern in the relation between Christianity and women “drawn from a sufficiently large sample of experience that can eventually stimulate dialogue and lead to yet further” analysis (1983, 21).

In this quest I found my desired points of connection in the roles that Christian women, particularly Quakers and Radical Unitarians, played in the first feminist movements of the nineteenth century; as well as the role that women played in the foundation of the new Christian denominations that went on to expand in Latin America during the twentieth century.

From the seventeenth century onwards women in Christian sectarian groups in England, such as the Quakers, the Levellers, the Fifth Monarchists and the Millenarians, started speaking publicly and demanding social changes. However, their demands did not necessarily revolve around women’s subordinate status in society nor the demands for women’s rights and recognition of subjectivity. As Hilda Smith explains, they were part of a “broader agenda” within their respective movements that searched “to undermine the authority of the established church and the monarchy”, so they could freely practice their faith without fear of persecution, incarceration or even death. Thus, “for them to have focused exclusively upon the status of women would have raised questions about their loyalty and their full commitment to political and religious change.” (H. L. Smith 2007, 194).

Come eighteenth and nineteenth century, women from these Christian denominations both in England and in the United States would play a fundamental role in the first organized feminists movements known today as First-wave feminism. Kathryn Gleadle shows that in England, from the 1830s onwards, women that came from Unitarian backgrounds played a decisive role in early Victorian feminism and the suffragette movement. According to her,

...the radical unitarians had developed a powerful social, political and cultural critique of modern society, and women's role within it.

(...)

The radical unitarians articulated a feminism in which, although women's rights to equal treatment with men was essential, this was only half the battle. Indeed, they did not promote women purely in those areas where they might achieve like men, but were also keen to herald the particular contribution women might make to society in their capacity as mothers. Indeed, they celebrated the importance of the domestic situation, encouraging men to also embrace the

caring values of the home and to reconsider their role within it. They wished women to advance in society not purely on men's terms, but hoped that the emancipation of women would form part of a wider cultural revolution, in which new values and priorities might triumph. (Gleadle 1998, 6-7).

Across the Atlantic, in the United States, where freedom of religion was -and still is- a cornerstone of the new nation⁵⁵, five women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Jane Hunt, Martha Coffin Wright and Mary Ann M'Clintock, all of them Quakers except for Stanton, decided to hold the first Woman's Rights Convention, held at Seneca Falls from the 19th to the 20th of July 1848 (Wellman 2004; McMillen 2008). As a result of this convention the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, known also as the Seneca Falls Declaration, was adopted. Its text, which was modelled by Stanton in the fashion of the American declaration of independence⁵⁶, has several references to God and the idea that men and women were created as equals, and as such

...being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause, by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth, growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as self-evident falsehood, and at war with the interests of mankind. (Declaration of Rights and Sentiments 1848)

The idea of women as rational creatures equal to men, that as such had the right and duty to develop their God-given capacities, as well as the denunciation of customs and ill-interpretation of the Scriptures, greatly recalls the works of both Astell and

⁵⁵ The first Amendment of the United States Constitution establishes the freedom of religion in the following terms: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

The original Constitution of the United States presented in 1787 and ratified in 1788, did not include a list of rights; its seven original articles delineate the frame of the government, what in legal theory is known as the organic part of a Constitution. In 1791 the Bill of Rights was adopted: ten articles that add to the Constitution different personal freedoms and rights, among which we found, precisely, the freedom of religion.

⁵⁶ One of the main paragraphs of the Seneca Falls Declaration states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." The American Declaration of Independence declares, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed..."

Wollstonecraft. This movements had at their base strong religious principles, and women used those principles to their advantage.

In Chapter III I also analyse the role that women played in the Pentecostal movement, that is, in the foundation of a new Christian denomination at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The reason why I have decided to include these women is twofold. Firstly, I want to recover their roles and voices, showing how women did not have a marginal but a central role in the development of these new denominations that have been expanding throughout the world, some, unfortunately, with particular sexist views. Secondly, because the Church in my last case study belongs to the Pentecostal tradition. Thus, the analysis of the role that women played in the birth of this new Christian denomination is a fundamental part of the thread I am trying to weave.

From the beginning, as the lives of Maria Woodworth-Etter and Aimee Semple McPherson show, women had had important roles, even as preachers and ministers, within the Pentecostal movement. According to Leah Payne, these women were able to have such important roles within the movement because they created a version of themselves that was at the same time “womanly (according to the standards of their day) and authoritative” (2015, 2). For her part, Lisa P. Stephenson (2011, 2012) analyses how women’s authority in the Pentecostal movement was built around their Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

1.2. Categories of Analysis

It is important to clarify some of the terms and categories I use in the present dissertation, such as: women, feminisms, feminist, feminine, Christianity and empowerment.

I believe, as stated by Lena Gunnarsson, that “the category ‘women’ is absolutely indispensable (sic) to the feminist project” and that its use “implies neither essentialism nor homogenisation” (2011, 24). Thanks to intersectionality we now understand that there are different structures of power under which a subject stand; as such, woman or women are not just so, but must be conceived and thus considered through, for example, the lenses of race, class, sexual orientation, among others. These categories are not separate entities and cannot be separated from each other, which means that the systems of oppression felt by a middle-class heterosexual white woman will be different than those suffered by a

poor lesbian black woman. As a consequence, it is not possible to assume anymore that women across the world, from different classes, cultures and ethnicities somehow constitute a homogeneous group.

Nevertheless, this recognition should not stop us in the search for a common ground because “the search for commonalities actually presupposes diversity, which in turn becomes meaningful only from the perspective of some kind of sameness” (Gunnarsson 2011, 28).

If “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sex and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1986, 1067), then there are categories through and in which those relationships operate. In other words, if we contended that there are cultural and historical factors that have created gendered subjectivities and relations, then we must admit that those factors, in different ways and with different contents, have given us the categories of men and women; which, no matter if we believe that they can be or have to be dismantled or not, create the reality we live in and the one we analyse.

Realizing that categories such as men and women are in fact a social construct does not mean they do not exist or should not be used to analyse reality. What it signifies is that “*although real*, [men and women] are not pre-given, static entities but products of historically determined human activity and thus subject to change” (Gunnarsson 2011, 29).

Appropriating the words of Luce Irigaray, “I am not only a female but a woman because I belong to a subjective world, a subjective identity, different from those of a man. Such a subjectivity can be analyzed as a specific way of relating with myself, with the other or others, with the world.” (2009, 13). This does not mean a reductionism to a natural, biological or essential destiny, but the recognition that being a woman corresponds with a particular construction of subjectivity because of social, cultural and historical factors.

Thus, it is possible to say that women cannot be considered a fixed category anymore, which is why I see the need to explain how I understand it in the present dissertation.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the category women means people that were born female, have been always socialized as female and who identify themselves as women. In this definition I necessarily have to take into consideration the historical contexts of the different cases I have analysed, in which being a man or a woman is

something biologically defined, even if it is recognized that the differences between men and women, and the subsequent subjugated position of women, are not natural but a product of custom and lack of education. In other words, the women I analyse in my dissertation do not put into question the idea of being man or woman, that is a given factor, what they do question is the consequences of that factor.

Likewise, I have to bear in mind the fieldwork I undertook, in which different member of the CGMJCI expressed a predominantly natural or biological definition of women, with statements such as, “from birth the Lord gives us a sex” and “reproductive organs determine who is a woman and who is man”⁵⁷. One of them stated that sometimes “there are bodies that are born men but feel like women... men that are born men but are women, want to be women and they have surgery and then they feel like women”⁵⁸. However, the majority of the members I interviewed felt that being a man or a woman was something fixed by God, although they questioned the consequences of that fact and considered that men and women are able to accomplish the same kind of tasks.

However, I recognize that in other contexts and researches the category women can be understood in different ways, because it may include, for example, the gendered experiences of trans women.

Regarding feminism, I consider it both a collective and a personal recognition of women as an oppressed group due to gendered hierarchical relations between the sexes, accompanied with the commitment to overcome said oppression and improve the condition of women, which will result in a better society for all. This means not only the fight for the legal and material equality of men and women in the different aspects of social and political life, but also the re-evaluation of the traits that have traditionally been associated with women. This recognition can take different forms, and so there is not just one type of feminism, but several feminisms. Not only do they differ temporarily speaking according to the different waves, but in their methods, presumptions and approaches⁵⁹.

Thus, a feminist is a person -not necessarily a woman-, or an approach that recognizes the aforementioned oppression and that works or has worked in order to

⁵⁷ “Desde que nacemos el Señor nos da un sexo”. “Los órganos reproductivos te dicen quien es mujer y quien es hombre”.

⁵⁸ “Cuerpos que nacen hombres y se sienten mujeres... Hombres que nacen hombres pero son mujeres, quieren ser mujeres y ya se operan y ya se siente como mujeres”

⁵⁹ There is liberal feminism, radical feminism, feminism of difference, materialist feminism, postmodern feminism, posthuman feminism, among other.

overcome it and improve the world as a result. This broad definition allows me to consider Astell and Wollstonecraft as feminists, even if they lived before the term was even coined.

Feminine is not the same as feminist. When I use the term feminine I am referring to what culturally and socially has been associated with women. Feminine in and of itself is neither good nor bad, it depends on the content that society has given to a particular trait. In any case, to re-evaluate the traits traditionally or generally associated with women is to take a feminist approach.

Another term that is clearly used throughout the present dissertation is Christianity. I take a broad definition of it, as a faith that includes different kinds of practices, denominations and approaches based on the belief on one God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christ, in this definition, is not necessarily considered the son of God, which means that both Trinitarians (the majority of Christians who believe in a God that is one being with three manifestations: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) and Unitarians (the ones that consider Jesus as a saviour inspired by God but not as God himself incarnated, thus believing in God as just one entity) are part of my definition. In any case, a Christian denomination or person, in my approach, must necessarily believe in Christ -either as a historical figure or at least as an allegory-, and guide itself or herself according to His teachings.

Last but not least, it is necessary to define what I understand as empowerment. In this, I take my cue from Magdalena León, who understands empowerment not just as the individual ability to be autonomous, do things for one's own and being able to define one's own destiny; but also, as a collective process of creating a community and generating changes,

Empowerment includes both individual change and collective action. Empowerment as self-confidence and self-esteem must be integrated with a sense of process with the community, with cooperation and solidarity. By considering the historical process that creates the lack of power, it becomes evident the need to alter the current social structures; that is, to recognize the imperative of change⁶⁰ (León 2001, 97)

Empowerment is then a strategy to change one's life but also to transform social structures, consequently changing the world for the better. In this sense, empowerment

⁶⁰ Originally in Spanish. "El empoderamiento incluye tanto el cambio individual como la acción colectiva. El empoderamiento como autoconfianza y autoestima debe integrarse en un sentido de proceso con la comunidad, la cooperación y la solidaridad. Al tener en cuenta el proceso histórico que crea la carencia de poder, se hace evidente la necesidad de alterar las estructuras sociales vigentes; es decir, de reconocer el imperativo del cambio" This and any other translation of this text, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

becomes a tool for utopia, because if I recognize or, as a woman of the CGMJCI told me, feel that I am capable, then I can hope for a better future -one that includes the experiences and subjectivity of women-, and take the necessary steps to achieve it, both for myself and for society at large.

This better future implies a re-evaluation of power relations, that starts with recognizing that they exist and that in order to achieve a better world they have to be overcome. Overcoming power relations does not necessarily mean to give power to women at the expenses of men. This would be what León calls *zero sum power*, where “the increase in power of a person or group implies the loss of power of the other person or group”, what she defines as “power *over*”, identifies as “the ability to impose decisions on others”⁶¹ (2001, 101).

Instead, it is my belief that the empowerment of women gives rise to a *positive sum power*, where “the power that a person or a group has, increases the total available power. It is a generative, productive power. It allows sharing power and favours mutual support”⁶² (León 2001, 102).

In the next chapter I will try to show how different women, in different times and geographical positions have used and continue to use Christianity as tool for empowerment, that is, as an instrument to find their voice, demand social changes, organize themselves and others, and achieve a better world for all.

⁶¹ “...poder suma-cero (...) es aquél en que el aumento de poder de una persona o grupo implica la pérdida de poder de la otra persona o grupo. Es el poder SOBRE, un poder dominador, controlador, con capacidad de imponer decisiones sobre otros”

⁶² “el poder que tenga una persona o un grupo incrementa el poder total disponible. Es un poder generativo, productivo. Permite compartir el poder y favorece el apoyo mutuo.”

Chapter 2. Questioning Christian principles: Astell and Wollstonecraft

Both Mary Astell (1666-1731) at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) at the end of the eighteenth century, wrote seeking to improve the condition of women. These two authors believed that women's degraded state originated in their lack of education, due to custom and prejudice, rather than any natural or biological reason.

I maintained that these two authors are and should be considered feminists. Although the terms feminism and feminist were coined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the existence of the word does not limit the extent of the idea. As Karen Detlefsen points out, "a concept with a history will mean very different things throughout the lifetime of that concept precisely because of the different meanings brought to it by different historical *contexts*. This can be said of the *idea*—whether the word exists or not—of feminism.", and so it is possible "that we can recognize ideas from the past as being feminist ideas *for that time period*, or feminist ideas given *what they subsequently made possible* in the evolution of feminism." (2017, 194).

Within this line of thought, Ruth Perry (1986) indicates, citing the works of Joan Kinnaird, Hilda Smith and Moira Ferguson, that it is possible to characterize writers and works of the seventeenth century as feminist when they recognize women as a social oppressed group, subject to subordination, and include the desire to improve such condition. That is precisely what both Astell and Wollstonecraft did, they wrote and advocated on behalf of women, recognizing that they were a particular group in society for which education was being denied and that was being systematically oppressed in the name of custom and tradition, alleging a false natural disparity among the sexes.

According to Perry, Astell was the first English writer to explore "the way men systematically tyrannized over women in society" (1986, 17), she was able to identify women as a whole and champion their causes, in her work she was able to recognize the oppression women were victims of and established her "conviction of women's intellectual and moral worth" (18). For her part, Claudia L. Johnson introduces Wollstonecraft as a "dauntless advocate of political reform" who "in her own –brief – lifetime and ever since, achieved notoriety principally for her championship of women's rights" (2002, 1).

2.1. *Becoming acquainted with Astell and Wollstonecraft*

Even if Astell and Wollstonecraft were a century apart⁶³ and on opposite sides of the political spectrum⁶⁴, they both advocated on behalf of women, particularly for their right to a proper education. This advocacy had a strong Christian base: women and men had been created by God, they were both a representation of His image and His infinite and perfect love, and, as such, both were entitled to be educated so their souls could meet their goal and their Maker.

Although the basic principle was the same, the solutions Astell and Wollstonecraft posited in order to overcome the devaluated and degraded condition of women were not identical. In fact, their projects differ in several aspects. Astell spoke to the *Ladies*, that is to say, to women of high rank belonging to the aristocracy⁶⁵; Wollstonecraft, instead, explicitly addressed her project to middle class women, considering people from the upper classes vain and helpless beings who only lived to amuse and gratify themselves⁶⁶. Astell proposed a religious retirement for women only, financed by their families by a 500 pound contribution, a price she considered far less than that of the dowry women's families had to pay upon marriage⁶⁷; while Wollstonecraft envisioned proper day-schools established by the government where boys and girls would be educated together⁶⁸. Astell explicitly stated that the education she proposed did not mean, by any degree, the possibility for women to preach or held public office but aimed only to offer them the means to be truly Christians⁶⁹, which by consequence would have made them fit to better

⁶³ Astell published Part I of her *Serious Proposal* in 1694 and Part II in 1697. Wollstonecraft published her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792.

⁶⁴ Astell was for an absolute Monarchy, a representative of Tory causes, and a conservative member of the Church of England (Perry 1986; Springborg 2002), whereas Wollstonecraft was an advocate of the principles of the French Revolution, a critic of Monarchy and a Christian by her own terms and not those of the Church (C. Jones 2002; Taylor 2002, 2003).

⁶⁵ As Patricia Springborg (2002) notes on her commentaries to *A serious proposal*, Astell's project was aimed to the upper classes.

⁶⁶ "The instruction which has hitherto been addressed to women, has rather been applicable to *ladies*... addressing my sex in a firmer tone, I pay particular attention to those in the middle class, because they appear to me in the most natural state" (VRW, 9).

⁶⁷ "Mary Astell envisioned her institution as relieving not physical but intellectual hunger, and the women she had in mind were the daughters of well-to-do parents for whom the £500 she suggested as an entrance fee would be considerably less than the price of a dowry" (Perry 1986, 15).

"Who will think 500 pounds too much to lay out for the purchase of so much Wisdom and Happiness? Certainly, we shou'd not think them too dearly paid for by a much greater Sum..." (SPL Part I, 107)

⁶⁸ "Day schools, for particular ages, should be stablished by government, in which boys and girls might be educated together." (VRW, 167).

⁶⁹ "We pretend not that Women shou'd teach in the Church, or usurp Authority where it is not allow'd them; permit us only to understand our own duty, and not be forc'd to take it upon trust from others; to be at least so far learned, as to be able to form in our minds a true Idea of Christianity" (SPL Part I, 81). In Part II she affirms, "Women have no business with the Pulpit, the Bar or *St. Stephens Chapel*" (SPL Part II, 196). According to the

educate children and to teach their neighbours by example⁷⁰. Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, stated that women should be able to participate in government and study politics, be physicians as well as nurses, and pursue different kinds of businesses⁷¹.

Nevertheless, these two authors also have points of convergence. They both, as stated before, affirmed that men and women were created in God's image, and as such both had not only the right but the divine duty to live up to God's example, for which education was of paramount importance. In Astell's view, women should be Christians not because custom demanded them to be, but because they truly understood the foundations of Christianity and could give reasons as to why they were Christians. In the same line of argument, Wollstonecraft points out that there cannot be morality without knowledge and that "if woman be allowed to have an immortal soul, she must have, as the employment of life, an understanding to improve" (VRW, 63).

These ideas, both in the case of Astell (Perry 1986; Springborg 2002; Apetrei 2010) and in the case of Wollstonecraft (Taylor 2003), were highly influenced by the Cambridge Platonists and their concept of *recta ratio*, Right Reason, understood as "a divine faculty in the soul which mystically linked human Reason with the transcendent mind of God" (Apetrei 2010, 99). For both of them, reason was a God-given faculty and, as such, men and women had the duty and right to adequately develop it.

Likewise, Astell and Wollstonecraft exposed the importance of controlling the passions, i.e., of them being under the control of reason,

It is not a fault to have Passions, since they are natural and unavoidable, and useful too; for as the Inclinations are the Wings of the Soul, so these give Life and Vigor to Inclinations, by disposing the Body to act according to the Determination of the Mind. But the faults lies here, we suffer 'em too often to get the Mastry of the Mind, to hurry it on to what Objects they please

notes by Springborg (2002), Saint Stephen's Chapel refers "metonymically to the House of Parliament", so it is fair to say that Astell disregarded both the idea of women preachers and of women in politics.

⁷⁰ In reference to the education of Children, Astell declares, "I am now inclin'd to declare, that it is design'd a part of their business shall be to give the best Education to the Children of Persons of Quiality (...) the forming minds shall be the particular care of those od their own Rank; who cannot have a more pleasant and useful employment than to exercise and encrease their own knowledge, by instilling it into these young ones, who are most like to profit under such Tutors." (SPL Part I, 103). She later indicates that women educated in the religious retirement she proposes will be able to influence others around them, "having calmly and steely observ'd and rectify'd what is amiss in our selves, we shall be fitter to promote a Reformation in others. A devout Retirement will not only strengthen and confirm our Souls, that they be not infected by the worlds of Corruptions, but likewise so purify and refine them, that they will become Antidotes to expel the Poyson in others, and spread a salutary Air on ev'ry Side" (SPL Part I, 105).

⁷¹ "I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government (...) Women might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses (...) They might, also, study politics, and settle their benevolence on the broadest basis (...) Business of various kind, they might likewise pursue, if they were educated in a more orderly manner, which might save many from common and legal prostitution" (VRW, 147-148).

and to fix it there, so that it is not able to consider any Idea but what they present. Whereas the Soul can if she please and if she makes use of her Authority in time, divert the course of the Spirits, and direct 'em to a new object, by Limiting or Extending her Ideas, and by laying aside those Passions excited, and entertaining new ones... This what we can and ought to do, and if we do not perform it, we act rather like the Slaves of the Senses than Creatures endued with Reason; but if we do, we can hardly receive any Injury from the Passions (SPL Part II, 214).

It is not a negation of the passions, because their existence and importance are recognized, but their due management by the use of reason. As Jacqueline Broad indicates, Astell “does not attempt to suppress or deny the passions, but gives them a vital role in the attainment of virtue. Virtue consists in governing the animal impressions and re-directing the passions, not in obliterating them.” (2007, 174).

Continuing with this line of thought, Wollstonecraft would write a century later that for lack of education and understanding women were at the mercy of their passions instead of being able to regulate them through the use of reason,

Miserable, indeed, must be that being whose cultivation of mind has only tended to inflame its passions! A distinction should be made between inflaming and strengthening them. The passions thus pampered, whilst the judgement is left unformed, what can be expected to ensue? – Undoubtedly, a mixture of madness and folly! (...) To their senses, are women made slaves. (...)

Women have seldom sufficient serious employment to silence their feelings; a round of little cares, or vain pursuits frittering away all strength of mind and organs, they become naturally only objects of sense... I will venture to assert that their reason will never acquire sufficient strength to enable it to regulate their conduct, whilst the making and appearance in the world is the first wish of the majority of mankind (VRW, 61. 75)

Furthermore, they both highlighted the importance of the role of women as wives and mothers, indicating that the education each of them was advocating for would result in improving women’s abilities to fulfil their duties as such. In Part I of her *Proposal* Astell argues that men cannot oppose the education of women because educated women will be an improvement in the condition of men, whether as their mothers or as their wives. In Part II, Astell reiterates this assertion,

As unnecessary as it is thought for Women to have Knowledge, she who is truly good finds great use of it, not only in the Conduct of her own Soul but in the management of her Family... Education of Children is a most necessary Employment, perhaps the chief of those who have any... at least the foundation of it, on which in a great measure the success of all depends, shou'd be laid by the Mother (SPL Part II, 202).

Wollstonecraft makes assertions in the same direction, “make women rational creatures, and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives and mothers”, adding, in any case that it also depends on men doing their part, “that is – if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers” (VRW, 178).

They also seem to agree in the fact that the education of children, which both place squarely in the hands of women, cannot be neither too rigid nor too indulgent, and in order to be properly balanced, reason and understanding, as well as the control of the passions, are necessary,

Tenderness alone will never discharge it well, she who wou'd do it to purpose must thoroughly understand Human nature, know how to manage different Tempers Prudently, be Mistress of her own, and able to bear with all the little humours and Follies of Youth, neither Severity nor Lenity are to be always us'd, it would ruin some to be treated in a manner which is fit for others. An Mildness makes some ungovernable and as there is stupor in many from which nothing but Terrors can rouse them, so sharp Reproofs and Solemn Lectures serve to no purpose but to harden others, in faults from which they might be won by agreeable Address and tender application.” (SPL Part II, 203).

In the words of Wollstonecraft,

Mankind seem to agree that children should be left under the management of women during their childhood. Now, from all the observation that I have been able to make, women of sensibility are the most unfit for this task, because they will infallibly, carried away by their feelings, spoil a child's temper. The management of the temper, the first, and most important branch of education, requires the sober steady eye of reason; a plan of conduct equally distant from tyranny and indulgence: yet these are the extremes that people of sensibility alternately fall into; always shooting beyond the mark (VRW, 68).

After this briefly overview of the work of both authors, let us go into the religious bases of their advocacy in favour of women. In Astell's case, I will be examining her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, particularly the first part, with some comments on the second. For Wollstonecraft I will centre the analyses upon *A Vindication to the Rights of Women*.

2.2. Mary Astell: equality under God and the education of women

Astell can be considered one of the first English feminist theorists. However, she is also, as Catharine S. Stimpson points out in the foreword to Perry's 1986 biography, a challenging figure for feminism (1986, xii). She was a member of the High Anglican

Church, a Tory and strong defendant of absolute monarchy. As such, her views are considered predominantly conservative. For this reason, according to Hilda L. Smith, Astell's political and religious stands have been viewed "either as a significant drag on her feminism, or as barriers which she successfully overcame" (2007, 193). In the present dissertation, in line with the analysis made by Sharon Achinstein and Hilda Smith, I contend that Astell did not formulate her feminist views despite her religious (and political) beliefs, but precisely thanks to them.

Astell's royalist standpoint is well justified in her personal history and background⁷². Mary Astell was born in 1666 in Newcastle in a gentry's family. Her father was a coal merchant and the clerk of the corresponding guild, known as the Hostmen. During the civil war the Hostmen were royalists, thus supporters of Charles I, whom Astell would come to see as a Martyr. Later, when she moved to London and Chelsea, Astell surrounded herself with noble women, particularly Lady Catherine Jones⁷³, Lady Elizabeth Hastings and Lady Ann Coventry, all of them Tories and High-Church Anglicans. These women were Astell's friends and patrons, supporting her financially and sharing her views and some of her attitudes towards life. All three of them were single and supported and encouraged the education of women in different ways. According to Perry, although "Astell was not born to the wealth or class of these women... she had educated herself to an unusual degree, and her articulate presence, her gracious manners, and her conservative political and religious opinions qualified her... for entrée into this aristocratic circle. By the time her writing became known, Astell was acquainted with her wealthy neighbors and they had decided to take her under their collective wing" (1986, 206).

In the intellectual realm, Perry (1986) identifies Ralph Astell, Astell's paternal uncle, as her earliest influence and the one who introduced her to the Cambridge Platonists and their idea that reason was God-given. As Apetrei points out, early modern Platonists and Astell herself believed in *recta ratio*. This Right Reason, "was the 'candle of the Lord' in the 'spirit of man' of Proverbs 20:27, a spark of divine radiance which made it possible 'to attain an almost mystical awareness of God at the point where the rational and the spiritual merge'" (Apetrei 2010, 99).

⁷² For a detailed account, see *The Celebrated Mary Astell. An Early English Feminist* by Ruth Perry, particularly chapter two "The Coal of Newcastle" and chapter eight "The Company she keeps".

⁷³ Lady Catherine Jones was, by far, the most important of her friends. Astell dedicated *Letters Concerning the love of God* and *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a daughter of the Church* to Lady Jones, and in her declining year settled in her house (Perry 1986; Springborg 2002).

2.2.1. *All equal in our dependence on God*

It would be Descartes with his dualism and the fact that the rational human mind had no sex that would serve as the bases for Astell's feminism. In Detlefsen's words, who distinguishes between two types of feminisms in Astell⁷⁴, "Astell's equality feminism starts from a commitment to a Cartesian ontology of the human, specifically his dualism of soul and body according to which the thinking soul is the mark of the divine within each of us and is our human essence." (2017, 197).

This is clear from the onset of Astell's *Proposal*, in which she asks, "since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?" (SPL Part I, 80), pointing to the fact that if male and female souls were actually identical, then both men and women had the duty to develop their minds in order to rise up to God. In this, Astell kept in line with the Cambridge Platonists, who maintained that reason was God-given (Perry, 1986).

Thus, as Apetrei (2010) and Detlefsen (2017) clearly state, even if some contemporary authors, such as Genevieve Lloyd or Jonathan Israel, see Cartesianism as troublesome or even contrary to feminism because they find it aligned reason with mental male discipline and the passions with the female, Astell's works show that the Cartesian project was actually of great promise to women. If the mind had no sex, then Cartesian dualism provided "an ontological basis for the radical egalitarianism of women's and men's natures as well as their modes of reasoning." (Detlefsen 2017, 192).

Furthermore, reading *A Serious Proposal* closely, it is possible to find, as Apetrei (2010) formulates, that Astell inverted the categories, aligning women with reason and virtue, and men with the brutish passions, pointing out, once again, that the only cause of the difference between them was a matter of instruction, nor of constitution,

...instead of inquiring why all Women are not wise and good, we have reason to wonder that there are any so. Were the Men as much neglected, and as little care taken to cultivate and improve them, perhaps they wou'd be so far from surpassing those whom they now despise, that they themselves wou'd sink into the greatest stupidity and brutality. The preposterous returns that the most of them make, to all the care and pains that is bestow'd on them, renders this no uncharitable, nor improbable Conjecture. One wou'd therefore almost think, that the wise

⁷⁴ One grounded on the equality of the sexless soul, which Detlefsen identifies with contemporary equality feminism; and the other based on the value of traits traditionally associated with women.

disposer of all things, foreseeing how unjustly Women are denied opportunities of improvement from without has therefore by way of compensation endow'd them with greater propensions to Vertue and a natural goodness of Temper within, which if duly manag'd, would raise them to the most eminent pitch of heroick Vertue.

(...)

The Incapacity [of women], if there be any, is acquired not natural... (SPL Part I, 51-52).

If the reason for the pitiful condition that women found themselves in was a matter of instruction, then giving them access to the right kind of education was an imperative requirement for the development of their reason, a characteristic that God had bestowed upon all members of humankind.

The education of women, at least of highborn women, was a concern of the time. As Florence Smith indicated in her 1916 work on Astell, with the development of Protestantism and the closing of monasteries, where up to that point noble and gentry women could study and choose a life different from marriage, women lost their chance of an education. Therefore, Astell was not the first, not the only one, to promote women's education. Before her, we find the writings of Bathsua Makin (c.1600– c.1675) and Anna Van Schurman (1607–1678)⁷⁵. According to Perry, these two “earlier writers become enmeshed in the question of whether or not women are educable, and whether education will ruin their modesty. Astell, on the other hand, takes the offensive. Instead of defending women's right to an education, she assumes it and carries the argument from there, criticizing the social institutions (schools, marriage) which thwart women's intellectual ambition” (1986, 15). After Astell, as Springborg (2002) underscores, many writers, particularly men, stole and plagiarized her work, proposing monastery-like places for women, while at the same time rejected Astell's proposal and made fun of her⁷⁶.

Although Perry states that Astell assumes women's right to education as a starting point, if one reads closely her proposal, it will take us to the conclusion that *right*, considered as the legal entitlement to have or to do something, might not be the correct term. For Astell education was not a right, i.e., the possibility to do something, but a duty, an obligation of human kind in order to fulfil the will of God and achieve perfect happiness in the other life. As such, when Astell introduces her “Method of Thinking” in

⁷⁵ For studies on the works of Makin and Van Schurman see, among others: Wiesner, Merry E. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000; D'Amore, Manuela and Michèle Lardy. *Essays in Defence of the Female Sex: Custom, Education and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

⁷⁶ “For every George Wheler who gave unqualified acknowledgment to Astell in A Protestant Monastery of 1698, there were ten who stole her ideas without acknowledgment and then satirized her to cover their track” (Springborg 2002, 18).

Part II of her *Proposal*, she states, “GOD does nothing in vain, he gives no Power or Faculty which he has not allotted to some proportionate use, if therefore he has given to Mankind a Rational Mind, every individual Understanding ought to be employ’d in somewhat worthy of it.” (SPL Part II, 168).

Is this view of education as a duty necessary to climb up to God and to reach the kingdom of heaven in the afterlife, which makes Detlefsen declare that we must not think of Astell as part of the liberal tradition, because “neither women nor men have rights. [Instead] their rational natures entail equal duties that they all have toward God.” (2017, 195). In the same line of argument, Sharon Achinstein points out that since Astell based her arguments on the essential dependence of human beings on God, her starting point completely denied human self-sufficiency or autonomy—the premise of the liberal theory, which makes it “hard to figure out how anyone in Astell’s system could have ‘political rights’ at all” (Achinstein 2007, 24).

It is precisely these strong Christian beliefs and her allegiance to Tories and royalists that allowed her to formulate her feminist stand. By being in the margins, Astell was able to confront and rebuff the liberal ideas of her time, proclaimed by both the Whigs and the dissenters, who demanded a greater participation of all men in the public arena, while leaving women in a relegated, subordinate state. As stated by Hilda Smith, Astell was able to realise that “while subjection to a monarch’s rule limited one’s standing and individuality, it limited men’s and women’s in equal measure, whereas men—from Levellers to Dissenters—who were pressing for a new form of citizenship during the second half of the seventeenth century constructed an ideology that elevated them, while leaving their sisters behind.” (2007, 204). Perry, in her 1990 article, had already argued that Astell was able to recognize that the condition of women after the Glorious Revolution and all its liberal and republican theory did not improve, but actually worsened⁷⁷.

According to Perry, Astell was able to see through the rhetoric of the liberal theory that excluded women and any participation of theirs in the public sphere. If, as theorized by Locke, citizenship was dependant on property, then women, who were not even owners of their own body and were not able to dispose freely of their own time, energy

⁷⁷ “The period following the Glorious Revolution was a time for reasserting male authority and for reinventing all the reasons for women’s subservience to men... // Nor did the Glorious Revolution do anything to extend the political entitlement of women as a class in a formal way. Although it established men’s rights to resist tyranny and to insist on a Protestant succession, in theory as well as in practice it tightened the reins on women and reaffirmed men’s power over them” (Perry 1990, 449).

or personal urges, were automatically excluded from the category of citizen. By excluding family relations as the justification of power, replacing them with a contractual idea of government, when women were not able to enter contracts, any theoretical or actual claim of political rights certain women might have had based on their relations was eliminated. Consequently, Perry claims that, “Astell's construction of herself as a free British citizen, subject to no one but her monarch, was a radical reconception of women's place in the polity. In bypassing the political contract made by men, Astell at once invoked the earlier doctrine of the divine right of monarchs over all subjects alike and at the same time denied the power of all men over all women.” (1990, 452).

I would venture, in accordance with Achinstein, that more than her party politics and allegiances, what was fundamental for this reconfiguration was Astell's theology and her Christian faith. In Part II of her *Proposal*, she clearly states that all human beings are dependent on God,

Above all things we must be thoroughly convinc'd of our entire Dependance on GOD, for what we Know as well as for what we Are, and be warmly affected with the Sense of it, which will both Excite us to Practise, and Enable us to Perform the rest. (SPL Part II, 165).

It is in this dependence that her equality between men and women is based, because we all have the same duty to develop our reason in order to live up to God's will and to achieve a happy, perfect afterlife. It is, therefore, the obligation of all human beings to fulfil this duty that serve as the basis for Astell's conception of equality and her demands for women's education,

“For if the Grand Business that Women as well as Men have to do in this World be to prepare for the next, ought not all their Care and Industry to Centre here? and since the matter is of Infinite Consequence is it equitable to deny 'em the use of any help? If therefore Knowledge were but any ways Instrumental, tho at the remotest distance, to the Salvation of our Souls, it were fit to apply our selves to it; and how much more when it is so necessary, that without it we can't do any thing that's Excellent, or Practise Vertue in the most Perfect manner.” (SPL Part II, 200).

2.2.2. *The education of women as a utopian project part of the Anglican movement for the reformation of manners*

A great concern in Astell's time was the reformation of manners and morals according to the principles of the Anglican Church. To this purpose, during the 1690s

different Societies for the Reformation of Manners were born, among which, the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), founded in 1699, played a significant predominant role (Perry 1986; H. Smith 2007). Albeit its name, the SPCK goal was not so much Christian Knowledge but Anglican Knowledge⁷⁸. The Society considered that good works, helping others, and holy living, all of which could be attained through education, were the way to salvation (H. Smith 2007). They implemented education under the form of charity schools across England, privately equipped by people of quality but coordinated by the SPCK, which also provided the staff. In 1709, Astell founded a charity school in Chelsea for the daughters of outpensioners of the Royal Hospital. Her school was completely founded by the Ladies in her circle and none of the girls lived in the premises (Perry, 1986).

Hannah Smith (2007) maintains that Astell's contribution to the reformation of manners movement was not just through the foundation of her charity school, but also by virtue of the first part of her *Serious Proposal*, "if it is set against the backdrop of the prevailing Anglican obsession with education as a means of creating—and stabilizing—an Anglican society, where neither debauchery nor dissent could exist" (2007, 34).

Astell's original *Proposal* was to "erect a *Monastery*, or if you will... we will call it a *Religious Retirement*, and such as shall have a double aspect, being not only a Retreat from the World for those who desire that advantage, but likewise, an institution and previous discipline, to fit us to do the greatest good in it" (SPL Part I, 73). The purpose of it, as stated by Astell herself, was mainly the religious education of the Ladies congregated there, because "Religion is the adequate business of our lives, and largely consider'd, takes in all we have to do-, nothing being a fit employment for a rational Creature, which has not either a direct or remote tendency to this great and *only* end" (SPL Part I, 76-77).

Since for Astell "Ignorance [was] the cause of most Feminine Vices" (SPL Part I, 62), being that "ignorance and a narrow education lay the Foundation of Vice, and Imitation and Custom rear it up" (67); it comes as no surprise that her *Proposal* focuses on granting women a good, proper education.

For Astell, a good education was a way of giving women the foundations to rationally practice Christianity, because for her

⁷⁸ "The SPCK's interest was entirely sectarian. (...) while it was important that young women were trained in Anglican doctrines for the sake of their own souls, it was also important because girls were the mothers of the future, who, if taught the tenets of Anglicanism, would raise their children according to such principles. Schism and immorality would be stamped out at the source." (H. Smith 2007, 34).

Who is a Christian out of choice, not in conformity to those around her; and cleaves to Piety, because 'tis her Wisdom, her interest, her Joy, not because she has been accustom'd to it; she who is not only eminently and unmoveably good, but able to give a Reason why she is so; is too firm and stable to be mov'd by the pitiful Allurements of sin, too wise and too well bottom'd to be undermined and supplanted by the strongest Efforts of Temptation (SPL Part I, 70).

However, she meant a particular kind of Christianity: Anglicanism, because “thoroughly to understand Christianity as profess'd by the *Church of England*, will be sufficient to confirm her in the truth” (SPL Part I, 79). Hannah Smith (2007), states that Astell did not seem to comprehend the possibility that a woman could rationally choose any other Christian denomination different from Anglicanism. Although this might be true, I find it important to highlight that Astell also seems to take good care in stating that women should not be exposed to other conceptions of Christianity. When she describes the curriculum of her religious retirement, Astell makes it clear that there will be no need to learn “more Languages than are necessary”, and that it will be enough to understand and digest “a few well chosen and good [books]” (SPL Part I, 78). Also, that her *Religious* did not need to have “a Catalogue of those particular errors which oppose [the Church of England]” (SPL Part I, 79). Thus, taking measures to assure that they would learn only what would ensure their allegiance to the Church of England and, consequently, the salvation of their souls.

Astell was clearly against Dissenters and their different sects (Puritans, Quakers, etc.). When she calls for women to be Christian by choice and not custom, she explicitly underscores that said choice must be rational because,

Reason and Truth are firm and immutable, she who bottoms on them is on sure ground, Humour and Inclination are sandy Foundations, and she who is sway'd by her Affections more than by her Judgment, owes the happiness of her Soul in a great measure to the temper of her Body; her Piety may perhaps blaze high but will not last long (SPL Part I, 71).

Immediately after, Astell describes what she considers the reprehensible temper of people led by their passions, indicating that because affections are variable,

Such Persons are always in extreams, they are either violently good or quite cold and indifferent; a perpetual trouble to themselves and others, by indecent Raptures, or unnecessary Scruples; there is no Beauty and order in their lives, all is rapid and unaccountable... Having more Heat than Light, their Zeal out-runs their Knowledge, and instead of representing Piety as it is in it self, the most lovely and inviting thing imaginable, they expose it to the contempt and ridicule of the censorious World. (SPL Part I, 71).

This harsh description of what a true Christian should not be was aligned with the way High Anglican Churchmen characterized Dissenters. As Hannah Smith points out “It was conventional in such circles to condemn religious ‘enthusiasm’ in the strongest possible terms, for it was seen as proceeding hand in hand with dissent, schism, and—glancing back to the Civil Wars—political and religious rebellion” (2007, 36). Another example of Astell’s position against Dissenters was her refusal to allow women to preach⁷⁹, a common practice among Quakers.

This worry about Dissenters in a text dedicated to women is also indicative of a fear of the time: women seemed to be more attracted than men to dissenting practices and congregations, and so not only their souls but those of their children were at risk. Educating women in the doctrines of Anglicanism, which for Astell was the one and true Church, was then a guarantee not only of their faith and salvation but also of that of their children (H. Smith 2007).

Also aligned with the reformation of manners movement and the Anglican principles, was Astell’s belief that the best way of being a good Christian and, consequently, achieve salvation was through acts of charity and good works, “because we were not made for our selves, nor can by any means so effectually glorify GOD and do good to our own Souls, as by doing Offices of Charity and Beneficence to others” (SPL Part I, 76).

Therefore, Part I of Astell’s *Proposal* is not just a plan limited to the education of women in a peaceful, religious retreat, but a commitment with a set of principles and a project of an ideal world based on them. In this ideal world, women would play a fundamental role by being the beacons of reason, faith and virtue.

It is precisely because of this that Alessa Johns (2010) considers Astell’s *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* a utopian text. According to her analysis, the *Proposal* can be seen as a pragmatic approach to improve the condition of women and, in the process, of society at large, in which education was central and human kind could be gradually steered in the right direction, in this case by awakening and rightly developing women’s God-given reason and true virtue.

Fatima Vieira considers that the most important characteristic in identifying a text as utopian is “the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment towards the society one lives in”, because it allows the inclusion of a wide variety of texts driven

⁷⁹ “We pretend not that Women shou’d teach in the Church, or usurp Authority where it is not allow’d them” (SPL Part I, 81).

by “the principal energy of utopia: hope” (2010, 6-7). In this sense, utopia is “seen as a matter of attitude, as a kind of reaction to an undesirable present and an aspiration to overcome all difficulties by the imagination of possible alternatives” (Vieira 2010, 7).

Under this description, Part I of Astell’s *Proposal* can and should be seen as a utopian text. Astell, seeing women condemned to a life of appearances and ignorance, where their only worry was to enchant a man and get married, without having other possibilities or aspirations, no matter their social stance⁸⁰, came up with a solution. High-rank women would be educated in a religious retreat, not in order to remain there in permanent isolation, but to return to the world and teach by example. In Astell’s view, “such an Institution will much confirm us in Vertue and help us to persevere to the end, and by that substantial Piety and solid Knowledge we shall here acquire, fit us to propagate Religion when we return into the World.” (SPL Part I, 100). In the words of Hannah Smith, in the ideal world that Astell envisioned, her institution would “equip ladies with the necessary knowledge to live outside its walls as good Anglicans... [and] as agents of change.” (2007, 40).

In the introduction to her proposal, Astell describes the poor condition women were in, asking how they could be blamed for not cultivating their souls and not being truly virtuous, when they have not been taught how to do so,

When a poor Young Lady is taught to value her self on nothing but her Cloaths, and to think she’s very fine when well accoutred; When she hears say, that ’tis Wisdom enough for her to know how to dress her self, that she may become amiable in his eyes, to whom it appertains to be knowing and learned; who can blame her if she lay out her Industry and Money on such Accomplishments, and sometimes extends it farther than her misinformers desire she should? ... She is, it may be, taught the Principles and Duties of Religion, but not Acquainted with the Reasons and Grounds of them; being told ’tis enough for her to believe, to examine why, and wherefore, belongs not to her. And therefore, though her Piety may be tall and spreading, yet because it wants foundation and Root, the first rude Temptation overthrows and blasts it, or perhaps the short liv’d Gourd decays and withers of its own accord. But why should she be blamed for setting no great value on her Soul, whose noblest Faculty her Understanding is render’d useless to her? (SPL Part I, 69-70).

⁸⁰ In this regard, Perry explains that, “gender had become a more important determinant of educational status than social class. While the sons of rich plebeians were being educated at Oxford and Cambridge to fill the ranks of the church, it was becoming more and more commonplace for women who were their social superiors to remain ignorant and illiterate. The universities were open to the male offspring of brewers and haberdashers, but closed to the daughters of the oldest noble families of England... This possibility of mobility and opportunity for men but not women, as much as anything, struck in Astell’s craw. Increasingly it was possible and seemly for a man to move up in the world—whereas for a woman the obstacle of gender was insurmountable” (1986, 104-105).

Consequently, seeing this undesirable present, Astell proposes an alternative: her religious retirement for the education of Ladies. As she herself declares “One great end of this institution, shall be to expel that cloud of Ignorance, which Custom has involv’d us in, to furnish our minds with a stock of solid and useful Knowledge, that the Souls of Women may no longer be the only unadorn’d and neglected things” (SPL Part I, 77).

In it, the centrality of education that Johns (2010) identifies in process-oriented feminist utopias is evident and clear. The education that Astell proposes is not dependant on instructors, although at one point she remarks “care shall be taken that our Religious be under the tuition of persons of irreproachable Lives, of a consummate Prudence, sincere Piety and unaffected Gravity” (SPL Part I, 87). Instead, the learning she envisions is based “the purest and noblest Friendship”, which for her is,

The best Instructor to teach us our duty to our Neighbour, and a most excellent Monitor to excites us to make payment as far as our power will reach. It has a special force to dilate our hearts, to deliver them from that vicious selfishness and the rest of those sordid Passions which express a narrow illiberal temper, and are of such pernicious consequence to Mankind. (SPL Part I, 99).

The friendship Astell is thinking about is not “like those intimacies that are abroad in the World, which are often combinations in evil and at best but insignificant dearnesses”, but “the greatness usefulness, the most refin’d and disinterest’d Benevolence, a love that thinks nothing within the bounds of Power and Duty, too much to do or suffer for its Beloved; And makes no distinction betwixt its Friend and its self, except that in Temporals it prefers her interest.” (SPL Part I, 99).

William Kolbrener, in his essay on the design of friendship in the works of Astell⁸¹, formulates that in Part one of *A Serious Proposal* Astell “opens up the way for a conception of friendship which is not merely corrective... but also both satisfying and redemptive” (2007, 60). It is a feminine friendship, one that comes from a deepest knowledge of the other, and its recognition as subject (Detlefsen 2017)⁸². As Johns points out, Astell’s *Proposal* highlights the importance of community, “where not only comradeship but love, intimacy and spiritual connection characterize the ties between members” (2010, 184), which is another reason why it can be consider a feminist utopia.

⁸¹ Kolbrener does a comparative analysis between the concept of friendship in *Letter Concerning the Love of God* and the one that emerges from Part I of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*. In this chapter, I will focus on the concept as contained in *A Serious Proposal*.

⁸² “Astell’s account of female friendship rests upon an individual recognizing the subjectivity of others. This is supported by her belief that true friendship requires that we come to know the soul of another and to acknowledge the likeness of that soul to one’s own; both are subjects.” (Detlefsen 2017, 204)

For her part, Detlefsen recognizes in this exaltation of feminine friendship a second kind of feminism in Astell, one that is “grounded in the recognition of the value—sometimes even the superiority—of traits typically associated with women” (2017, 195). According to Detlefsen’s analysis, with which I agree, Astell “focus[ed] on female-coded traits of community and friendship rather than the male-coded trait of isolated individualism”, in order to provide a solution for the wrongs she saw in her world (2012, 201).

One of the other elements that Johns identifies as characteristic of feminist process-oriented utopia is that they “embrace a view of human nature as malleable and social” (2010, 178). By highlighting the importance of community and friendship in the development of women’s God-given reason, Astell is recognizing precisely that humans are by nature social beings and, as such, can learn to guide their lives by the good or bad examples of others around them. Because Astell sees in the customs of the outside world the cause of the evils suffered by women, for her it is necessary for women to leave that world for a while and create their own community; one in which women will learn in amicable retreat, so that once women return into the world they would not be once again tempted by it.

Astell invites Ladies to,

Exchange the vain Poms and Pageantry of the world, empty Titles and Forms of State, for the true and solid Greatness of being able to despise them. You will only ... the deceitful Flatteries of those who under pretence of loving and admiring you, really served their own base ends for the seasonable Reproofs and wholesome Counsels of your hearty well-wishers and affectionate Friends, which will procure you those perfections your feigned lovers pretended you had, and kept you from obtaining. (SPL Part I, 74).

By proposing a religious retirement only for women, Astell is imagining a separatist community in which women can find their own voice by being surrounded by feminine good examples, away from the ill-customs of the time. Monticelli, analysing the separatist nature of other seventeenth and eighteenth-century utopias that she describes as proto-feminist, states that separatism is a “necessary element for awareness” as well as “a narrative strategy to enhance female values considered indispensable for human and social progress”⁸³ (2003, 709). But Astell’s separatism is not permanent, she recognizes, pragmatically, that women are going to return to the world and become wives, mothers

⁸³ “elemento necessario alla presa di coscienza” e “strategia narrativa per esaltare i valori femminili, considerati indispensabili per il progresso umano e sociale”.

and, hopefully, good examples to others. As such, Lilley describes Astell's *Proposal* as a "flexible separatist retreat, which acknowledges, and makes integral, responsibilities in the world at large" (1992, 114).

Consequently, Astell's complete proposal is to give women a place to be away, at least for a while, from the world of courtship⁸⁴ and banalities; in which they would live in a closed community among other women. This community would allow women to create real and significant friendships, from which they would learn to develop their God-given reason, though amicable and respectful example, and, most importantly, to be truly Christians. Then, if they so desire to, women could return to the world to spread their acquire wisdom to those around them,

Neither this Prudence nor heroic Goodness are easily attainable amidst the noise and hurry of the world, we must therefore retire a while from its clamour and importunity, 105 if we generously design to do it good, and having calmly and sedately observ'd and rectify'd what is amiss in our selves, we shall be fitter to promote a Reformation in others. A devout Retirement will not only strengthen and confirm our Souls, that they be not infected by the worlds Corruptions, but likewise so purify and refine them, that they will become Antidotes to expel the Poyson in others, and spread a salutary Air on ev'ry Side. (SPL Part I, 104-105).

This ability to "expel the poyson in others" is what Johns, citing the utopian works of Mary Hamilton, identifies as the "reproductive power of education" (2010, 180); in virtue of which the women educated in Astell's Religious Retirement would be able, through their example, their faithfulness and their good works, to change society at large for the better,

And then what a blessed World shou'd we have, shining with so many stars of Vertue!, Who, not content to be happy themselves, for that's a narrowness of mind too much beneath their God-like temper, would like the glorious Lights of Heav'n, or rather like him who made them, diffuse their benign Influences round about. Having gain'd an entrance into Paradise themselves, they wou'd both shew the way, and invite all others to partake of their felicity. (SPL Part I, 101)

And to positively influence their own children,

Great is the influence we have over them in their Childhood, in which time if a Mother be discreet and knowing as well as devout, she has many opportunities of giving such a Form and Season to the tender Mind of the Child, as will shew its good effects thro' all the stages of his Life. But

⁸⁴ In his essay, Kolbrenner formulates "The desire of the *Letters*, associated with the 'false Representations' of satanic artifice is figured, in *A Serious Proposal*, as a principle which governs courtship and domestic relations. By contrast, the principle of authentic love, associated in *Letters* exclusively with love of the divine, manifests itself in *A Serious Proposal* in the "holy Conversation" of Astell's proposed religious community." (2007, 58-58).

tho' you should not allow her capable of doing good, 'tis certain she may do hurt: If she do not make the Child, she has power to marr him, by suffering her fondness to get the better of discreet affection. (SPL Part I, 106).

Astell acknowledged, as did most of her society at the time, the fundamental role that mothers had in shaping the mind and temper of their offspring. In addition, this aligned with the principles and goals of the movement for the reformation of manners, which trusted on the fact that women “if taught the tenets of Anglicanism, would raise their children according to such principles” (H. Smith 2007, 34).

These women would be able not only to positively influence their own children, but also to partake in the “Education to the Children of Persons of Quality”, as the most suitable tutors (SPL Part I, 103). This would give women that could not marry⁸⁵ a respectable solution once they came back to the world.

Hannah Smith (2007) also sees in Astell’s project a way of changing male manners, not just female ones –although the latter was its primary concern-. When Astell refers to the influence women have on their children, she all states, “a good and prudent Wife wou’d wonderfully work on an ill man” (SPL Part 1, 106), because, through her pious example she would be able to guide him back to the straight and narrow path. But even before marriage, women would be able to change male ways. By learning how to identify good men and to “detect the false values” of others, women would admire the first and scorned the second, effectively encouraging good behaviour in their suitors (H. Smith 2007, 42).

Therefore, it is possible to identify Part I of Astell’s *Serious Proposal* as a pragmatic utopian text in the terms formulated by Johns or, as stated by Detlefsen, as “a theory that addresses the lived experiences of real women in a way that is immediately practicable” (2017, 205). Hence, Astell’s project for the education of women does not aim only at improving women’s conditions, but at the betterment of society in general. She seemed to have had in mind a new ideal world based on Christian (Anglican) principles, guided by virtuous women of faith that knew how to use their God-given reason and how to awaken it in others.

This ideal world would, nonetheless, keep the same social structure. Astell was in no way a liberal thinker or an egalitarian. For her “monarchy was the best means for

⁸⁵ “Astell’s book also addressed another serious contemporary problem, the demographics of the marriage market: there were simply more women than men in London. Not all women could marry, and there was no creditable social solution for those who stayed single” (Perry 1986, 105).

keeping the general peace... republicanism licensed ever-changing groups of men to compete and fight with one another for political power, with inevitable bloodshed and suffering for all”, therefore “one authority was better than many, because less volatile” (Perry 1990, 448). This, combined with her gentry origins and her noble circle of friends and patrons, accounts for the fact that, as Johns points out, Astell’s project actually “reinforce class hierarchies” even if “society as a whole is to profit” (2010, 179).

Nevertheless, Part I of Astell’s *Serious Proposal*, with its project on women’s education and improvement of society, is a prime example of the relationship between Christianity and feminism. Her proposal, as I have shown, is based on two cornerstones. Firstly, the Cartesian mind/body dualism, which is what allows her to think of a sexless soul that has the duty to develop its God-given reason. Secondly, on the exercise of Christian principles such as virtue, charity and good works. Thus, in Astell’s work it is possible to see how Christianity served as a catalyst for the quest of equality between men and women.

2.3. *Mary Wollstonecraft: The Christian bases of the Rights of Woman*

Mary Wollstonecraft has always been part of the feminist imaginary. She was a prolific writer and wrote extensively on the matter of women’s education. Her best-known work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which took its name from her previous *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790), is as much a political statement as it is a treatise on the education of women. Her first book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), keeps in line with the conduct-book tradition of her times, as does her children’s book *Original Stories from Real Life...* (1788) and her anthology *The Female Reader* (1789), where education combines with precepts on duty and discipline (Richardson 2002; V. Jones 2002). She also wrote novels: *Mary: A fiction* (1788) and *Maria or, The Wrongs of Woman*, which she left unfinished and was published posthumously by Godwin in 1798. The last text she published, before her untimely death at childbirth, was *Letter Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796).

Shortly after Wollstonecraft’s death, her husband, William Godwin, published *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, where her love affairs and attempts of suicide were made public, with the undesired effect of destroying her reputation. According to Anne K. Mellor “the popular press then widely denounced

Wollstonecraft as a whore and an atheist, as well as a dangerous revolutionary” (2002, 155). For this reason, other women that were writing on behalf of women and endorsed Wollstonecraft’s ideas went to great lengths to distance themselves from her as a person (Mellor 2002). Nevertheless, she was soon rediscovered, becoming “*the* iconic figure of early western feminism, a central symbol of Woman in revolt” (Taylor 1999, 509).

Theorists seem to agree in the fact that Wollstonecraft’s body of work is both massive and complex. Janet Todd describes Wollstonecraft’s writings as “ambiguous, equivocal and just plain muddled”, which “open [her] therefore to varying interpretations” (1988, 104); while Cora Kaplan states that Wollstonecraft’s “body of work [is] at once so discursively emphatic and elusive that it upsets the tidy categorizations and standard narratives of social, political and cultural history” (2002, 247).

One of these interpretations, one that is not necessarily popular, is precisely the analysis about her religious beliefs and how they influenced her feminism, that is, of Wollstonecraft as a religious thinker. This religious side has been so disregarded that Barbara Taylor states,

Admirers of Mary Wollstonecraft are often reluctant to see her as a religious thinker... The reiterated ‘appeals to God and virtue,’ in A Vindication of the Right of Woman are ‘a dead letter to feminist now,’ a leading feminist critic tells us... it is certainly true that of all aspects of Wollstonecraft’s thought it her religious faith that has failed to speak to modern interpreters (2002, 99)

Therefore, retrieving Wollstonecraft’s Christian foundations is not just an academic exercise, but also a political one. If we can see and understand the religious grounds of the feminist thinking of the author that, even today, is considered one of the mothers of feminism, then, maybe, we can start building bridges between mainstream feminist movements that dismissed religion⁸⁶ and religious women’s advocates who feel disenfranchised and are left without a voice.

⁸⁶ “Feminists today have decidedly mixed views about the value of religious belief. Materialists of course discount all religion as oppressive; secular humanists see it as either silly or pernicious. Even feminist theologians debate whether or not Christianity can possibly ‘empower’ women” (Michaelson 1993, 291)

2.3.1. *Equal creatures in reason and virtue*

The dismissing of Wollstonecraft's religious Christian beliefs can be traced back to her husband. Taylor (2002, 2003), Mellor (2002) and Kim Jacobs-Beck (2012) all account for the fact that in his *Memoirs* Godwin painted Wollstonecraft as not particularly religious, a person drawn to God not rationally but sensationally, and who did not call on God in her deathbed. But this representation owes more to Godwin's own beliefs and religious scepticism than to Wollstonecraft's real stance on the matter, after all, "he was an atheist, and he and Mary debated religion as well as politics. It is possible to imagine him dismissing her religious views after her death to portray her views as in line with his own" (Jacobs-Beck 2012, 65).

As a matter of fact, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* "contains at least fifty discussions of religious themes, ranging from brief statements on one or other doctrinal point to extended analyses of women's place within a divinely-ordered moral universe" (Taylor 2002, 99). These religious discussions are neither rhetorical nor simply a strategy or "ideological baggage" with no implications in her feminist discourse, but actually a fundamental part of it, so much so that "if Wollstonecraft's faith becomes a death letter to us, then so does much of her feminism, so closely are they harnessed together" (Taylor 2002, 99).

Wollstonecraft had different influences, one of which, recognized by all, is that of the rational dissenters. Dissenters, i.e., protestant Christians who separated from the Anglican Church, were not a coherent group; they had different theological views, which accounted for different denominations and sects. Rational Dissent was "forged by and for the *avant-garde* educated middle class" (Taylor 2003, 103), but its members were nevertheless subject to the Test Acts, a series of laws that barred them from public office and from taking degrees at Oxford or Cambridge (Taylor 2003; C. Jones 2002). Wollstonecraft was particularly close to Richard Price, a dissenting minister that preached near the place she and her sisters established a school in the 1780s. According to Chris Jones (2002), Price mentored Wollstonecraft in matters of moral philosophy, and in her own analysis, Jacobs-Beck (2012) finds several links between Price's sermons, in which reason is the way to God and virtue, with Wollstonecraft arguments in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

The central argument of *Rights of Woman* is that women are first and foremost rational creatures, and that reason, in consonance with what Astell had stated a century earlier⁸⁷, was a God-given attribute,

The nature of reason must be the same in all, if it be an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator; for, can that soul be stamped with the heavenly image, that is not perfected by the exercise of its own reason? Yet outwardly ornamented with elaborate care, and so adorned to delight man, "that with honour he may love," the soul of woman is not allowed to have this distinction, and man, ever placed between her and reason, she is always represented as only created to see through a gross medium, and to take things on trust. (VRW, 53).

If reason is the same in all, it should be developed by the same means and to the same ends: obtaining virtue, which, as reason, should be of the same kind in women and men,

Chastity, modesty, public spirit, and all the noble train of virtues, on which social virtue and happiness are built, should be understood and cultivated by all mankind, or they will be cultivated to little effect... nature has not made any difference (VRW, 140).

Therefore, for Wollstonecraft the problem with women of her time was not a matter of lack of rationality and innate sensibility, but of lack of proper education or, better yet, of an education that only concerned itself with making women gracious and agreeable to men's tastes, creating different moral standards for men and women.

For Wollstonecraft "every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason" (VRW, 21). However, women, being raised and educated only to please men, have not been given the instruction to properly exercise this God-given faculty,

The conduct of an accountable being must be regulated by the operations of its own reason; or on what foundation rests the throne of God?

(...)

Females have been insulted, as it were; and while they have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked with artificial graces, that enable them to exercise a short lived tyranny. Love, in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to be fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect; and this ignoble desire, like the servility in absolute monarchies, destroys all strength of character. Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women are, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature (VRW, 37).

⁸⁷ Although, as Taylor states "Astell's theological and feminist writings, very influential in her lifetime, were barely remembered by Wollstonecraft's day" (2003, 110).

As Michaelson, Taylor and Jacobs-Beck pointed out, this centrality of reason can be traced back to the rational Dissenters' idea of "private reason judgement as the foundation of true religion" (Taylor 2003, 104) or, in the words of Richard Price, "It is knowledge that raises one being above another. It is what gives us our distinction as reasonable creatures... It [knowledge] is the light and guide of our minds, and the foundation of our whole dignity." (Price cited by Jacobs-Beck 2012, 70). Thus, if being human is based on the use of our reason and if women are part of humanity, then one must conclude that in order to be fully part of humankind women must learn how to be creatures of reason, and not just of fancy.

This way of considering reason as a way to God, "our" connection to Him, was strongly influenced by the philosophical theories of the Cambridge Platonists⁸⁸, who believed that reason was the "'candle of the Lord' in the 'spirit of man'" (Apetrei 2010, 99). An idea that, as explained before, had a strong, important resonance in Astell's feminist positions and consequent *Proposal*.

Hence, these two female authors that apparently do not have much in common, actually have at the base of their feminism the Christian idea that reason is an expression of God and, as such, must be properly exercised by both men and women. This proper use of reason does not have only a worldly significance, as in rendering women better wives, mothers and citizens; but is also a prerequisite to a happy afterlife.

Wollstonecraft believed in the Rational Dissent idea that mortal existence was just "a probationary state, a trial period, from which the souls of the virtuous alone would emerge into eternal bliss" (Taylor 2003, 106). Under this light, Wollstonecraft's assertion that "surely there can be but one rule of right, if morality has an eternal foundation, and whoever sacrifices virtue, strictly so called, to present convenience... lives only for the passing day, and cannot be an accountable creature", takes a new meaning. If a creature cannot be accountable, then it cannot stand the final judgement and, consequently, can never enter the kingdom of heaven. This is why women should be considered "in the grand light of human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties" (VRW, 8).

For entering such kingdom actions are not enough, what counts most is the intention behind them, the fact that virtue and good behaviour have been consciously

⁸⁸ "The influence of Norris and other Cambridge Platonists... was still felt in liberal intellectual circles, particularly in the Rational Dissenting academies where their works were closely studied. A strong Platonist element was discernible in Unitarian thought, especially in Richard Price's moral philosophy" (Taylor 2003, 110).

chosen. This is the reason why Wollstonecraft asserts that “it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason” (VRW, 21). Hence, Michaelson states that for Wollstonecraft reason is not “an end in itself”, but a means to an end: “reason leads to virtue” (1993, 287), not because Wollstonecraft harnessed a class bias by which educated people were naturally more virtuous, but because for her “liberty is the mother of virtue” (VRW, 37). That is, for Wollstonecraft virtue must be a conscious free choice, not the result of obedience, and in order to be free it must come from the exercise of reason.

This exercise of reason will allow women to understand the will of God and, consequently, to aspire to be more like Him. From a different perspective, this was also Astell’s argument: women should be Christians, Anglicans to be exact, but not because custom imposed it, but because after learning how to use their God-given reason, Christianity was, for Astell, the only reasonable conclusion. We can find the same argument in Wollstonecraft,

I know that many devout people boast of submitting to the Will of God blindly, as to an arbitrary sceptre or rod.... Rational religion, on the contrary, is a submission to the will of a being so perfectly wise, that all he wills must be directed by the proper motive—must be reasonable. (VRW, 183)

Consequently, worshipping God, loving him, aspiring to be like Him, which is the aim of every creature, must be a result of reason and not of passion or sensibility,

For to love God as the fountain of wisdom, goodness, and power, appears to be the only worship useful to a being who wishes to acquire either virtue or knowledge. A blind unsettled affection may, like human passions, occupy the mind and warm the heart, whilst, to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God, is forgotten. (VRW, 46)

Both Astell and Wollstonecraft share a common foundation, the idea of a sexless God-given reason that must be rightly exercised by both men and women. Nevertheless, the means they propose to develop said reason, to light the candle of the Lord in women’s minds, radically differ.

2.3.2. *Revolution of female manners through a co-educational system of instruction*

Wollstonecraft addressed her *Vindication of the Right of Woman* to Talleyrand⁸⁹, appealing to the report on public education he had written⁹⁰, and urging him to reconsider his position on women's education. Wollstonecraft claimed that it was in the best interest of society to educate women in the same manner as men, because through the exercise of reason women would be able to understand and perform their duties,

Contending for the rights of women, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate, unless she know why she ought to be virtuous? unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good? ... the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations.

(...)

The more understanding women acquire, the more they will be attached to their duty, comprehending it, for unless they comprehend it, unless their morals be fixed on the same immutable principles as those of man, no authority can make them discharge it in a virtuous manner. (VRW, 4-5)

Consequently, she proposes to teach women “in common with man”, and to “let them attain conscious dignity by feeling themselves only dependent on God” (VRW, 36). This common education means precisely: instruction for men and women not only in the same manner, but also in the same spaces, together, learning the same subject and acquiring the same kind of knowledge. Wollstonecraft goes as far as outlining a system, which I transcribe to some extent:

Day schools for particular ages should be established by government, in which boys and girls might be educated together. The school for the younger children, from five to nine years of age, ought to be absolutely free and open to all classes.

(...)

⁸⁹ Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand was a French statesman and diplomat that served during the French revolution, under Napoleon, during the restoration of the monarchy and under King Louis-Philippe. Before the French revolution he was appointed Bishop of Autun. He represented the clergy as deputy in the National Assembly. During the French Revolution he sided with the revolutionaries and was excommunicated. He was also in charge of writing a report on public education, which he presented before the National Assembly on 1791 and became the bases of the public education system in France. For a study on Talleyrand see, among others: Cooper, Duff. *Talleyrand*. New York: Grove Press. 1932.

⁹⁰ In 1791 Talleyrand presented his Rapport sur L'Instruction Publique, fait au nom du Comité de Constitution.

And to prevent any of the distinctions of vanity, they should be dressed alike, and all obliged to submit to the same discipline, or leave the school.

(...)

After the age of nine, girls and boys, intended for domestic employments, or mechanical trades, ought to be removed to other schools, and receive instruction, in some measure appropriated to the destination of each individual, the two sexes being still together in the morning; but in the afternoon, the girls should attend a school, where plain work, mantua-making, millinery, etc. would be their employment.

The young people of superior abilities, or fortune, might now be taught, in another school, the dead and living languages, the elements of science, and continue the study of history and politics, on a more extensive scale, which would not exclude polite literature. Girls and boys still together? I hear some readers ask: yes. (VRW, 167-168).

In this programme the equality between the sexes seems obvious, but there is also the matter of class. While at first all children, both girls and boys, regardless of class, should all be together, from age nine Wollstonecraft proposes to divide them into two groups. On the one hand those who are intended for “domestic employment” and “mechanical trades”, and on the other those of “superior abilities, or fortune”; in so doing each can receive the appropriated instruction according “to the destination of each individual” and, in any case, boys and girls would still be together.

In this distinction, Alan Richardson sees a “concession to the starkly hierarchical class system of the time”, but he also maintains that the “possibility that children’s futures might be determined by ‘abilities’ rather than ‘fortune’ reflects the radically progressive character of Wollstonecraft’s imagined school of the future” (2002, 36). Hence, he seems to suggest that even if Wollstonecraft is not capable to rule out completely the role of fortune, considered as economic stance, in determining one’s future, she does give a predominant value to personal abilities as the predominant factor that could determine one’s fate. Although today we are aware that personal abilities are actually affected by social and economic conditions, for the time, the possibility that one’s destiny was not determined, at least not entirely, by the class one was born in, was revolutionary.

Wollstonecraft herself calls her ideas “Utopian dreams”, using it maybe as a derogatory term, because she goes on explaining how she arrived to them thanks to the exercise of her God-given reason,

Thanks to that Being [God] who impressed them on my soul, and gave me sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till becoming dependent only on him for the support of my virtue, I view with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex (VRW, 36-37).

But if we see her programme as a hope for a better future, as the “the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment towards the society one lives in” (Vieira 2010, 6), then surely Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* can be seen as a utopian project. Wollstonecraft aspires not only to a “revolution in female manners” (VRW, 45), as she states at one point in her text, but to the improvement of society as a whole. Therefore, Wollstonecraft herself states that the system she proposes would benefit both women and men,

In this plan of education, the constitution of boys would not be ruined by the early debaucheries, which now make men so selfish, nor girls rendered weak and vain, by indolence and frivolous pursuits. But, I presuppose, that such a degree of equality should be established between the sexes as would shut out gallantry and coquetry, yet allow friendship and love to temper the heart for the discharge of higher duties. (VRW, 169).

Consequently, as Mellor states, the revolution called on by Wollstonecraft would,

Dramatically change both genders. It would produce women who were sincerely modest, chaste, virtuous, Christian; who acted with reason and prudence and generosity. It would produce men who –rather than being trained to become petty household tyrants or slave-masters over their female dependents of ‘house-elves’- would treat women with respect and act toward all with benevolence, justice, and sound reason... And it would produce egalitarian marriages based – no longer on mere sexual desire- but on compatibility, mutual affection, and respect (2002, 142).

This, having a utopian nature, is a point in common between Astell’s *Proposal* and Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, but it is evident that the plans are completely different. Where Astell calls for a women’s only religious retirement, Wollstonecraft advises a national co-educational system, actually denouncing the vices she sees in places where women live together isolated, “I object to many females being shut up together in nurseries, schools or convents” (VRW, 128), because it creates a “gross degree of familiarity” (127).

Wollstonecraft does not seem to find any redeeming or positive qualities in all-female communities, unlike Astell who, as was explained before, saw female friendship as a corrective and redemptive way to virtue. Actually, by reading closely into *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, one realises that Wollstonecraft does not seem to find anything positive in the traits that were typically associated with women, which is why Susan Gubar coined in 1994 the term “feminist misogyny” applying precisely to Wollstonecraft’s body of work,

Repeatedly and disconcertingly, Wollstonecraft associates the feminine with weakness, childishness, deceitfulness, cunning, superficiality, an overvaluation of love, frivolity, dilettantism, irrationality, flattery, servility, prostitution, coquetry, sentimentality, ignorance, indolence, intolerance, slavish conformity, fickle passion, despotism, bigotry, and a 'spaniel-like affection'. The feminine principle, so defined, threatens –like a virus- to contaminate and destroy men and their culture (Gubar 1994, 456)

A deep analysis of Gubar's theory would require an entire chapter, if not an entire thesis, thus exceeding the scope of the present dissertation. Suffice is to say that where Astell exalts particular women's traits, like friendship or the importance of community, solidarity and the need for relying in others, in contrast opposition with the liberal agenda of her time; Wollstonecraft, as part of the liberal tradition and embedded in its possessive individualism, was "preoccupied with championing a kind of masculinity into which women [could] be invited rather than with enlarging or inventing a positive discourse of femininity" (Johnson 1995, 24).

For the purpose of this dissertation, however, what needs to be underscored is the fact that Wollstonecraft's programme lies over important religious Christian foundations, analogous to those that a century early inspired Astell's *Proposal*. Michaelson goes as far as to suggest that the core of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* "is a religious argument" (1993, 288). I, in consonance with both Michaelson and Taylor in their religious analysis, as well as with Johnson in her political one, dare to suggest that what lies under Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* is both religious and republican, showing how religious arguments can be appropriated by either side of the political spectrum.

2.4. Two practical concrete utopias based on Christian values

Anne K. Mellor differentiates between two kinds of utopias: abstract and concrete. She defines abstract utopias as "fantastical... generated out of pure desire and function as wish-fulfillment. They do not offer practical programs for social change, nor do they pretend to be 'prophetic'". In contrast, concrete utopian thinking has "a practical social purpose. It attempts, by portraying a potentially realizable world, to define precisely the nature and origin of social ill in the world in which the author lives... they define a moral vision... they offer some suggestions as to how their utopian vision might be achieved within history" (1982, 242).

Both Astell's and Wollstonecraft's projects fall into the category of concrete utopias. Both Astell's *Proposal* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* saw a social ill in the world they were living in: the degraded condition of women. They both identified the causes of such an ill: the customs of their time and the lack of proper education for women, who instead of receiving an instruction conducive to develop the abilities God had endowed them, were raised to please and be mere ornaments of a male dominated world. They both formulated a solution and suggestions on how to achieve it; this is the point in which their projects differ.

Astell proposes a single-sexed religious retirement in which women, thanks to a strong community based on female friendship, would learn how to use their God-given reason. After a time in this separatist retirement, if women wish or are constrained to do so, they can return to the world with the necessary tools to fight off ill-customs and be better wives and mothers, as well as an example to their neighbours.

Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, poses a co-educational public instruction system, in which boys and girls would be educated together and learn the same subjects, principles and tools. This co-education would not take place in an isolated place, but in day schools. It would result in better relations between men and women, because they would learn how to be amicable reasonable companions instead of passionate lovers, and would make women better wives, mothers and citizen, thus improving the world at large.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that what these female writers put forward are practical steps to achieve the right education for women and, in consequence, a better world. Both their projects can be classified, as Detlefsen does for Astell's *Proposal*, as a non-ideal theory, because they address "the lived experiences of real women in a way that is immediately practicable". (2017, 205).

The approach these female authors take regarding the importance of education in shaping women's attitudes has an immediate relation with the Cambridge Platonists idea, later inherited by Rational Dissenters, that there is a link between human reason and God, and a such human kind is perfectible. For Apetrei (2010), the theory developed by the Cambridge Platonists –as well as some of the non-conformist sects that were founded during seventeenth century England, to which I will refer to in the next chapter–, was a direct response to the Calvinist idea of double predestination, according to which God had already selected some for eternal salvation and others for eternal damnation.

Instead, the theory put forward by the Cambridge Platonists, applied by Astell and inherited by the Rational Dissenters, who, in turn, highly influenced Wollstonecraft,

considers that salvation can be achieved by all through the use of the right tools, i.e., reason and virtue, which can also lead to perfectibility. Thus, the malleable nature of human kind, based on which both Astell and Wollstonecraft advocate for the right education for women that would improve their condition and society at large, is a debtor of the Christian idea that humans are not irremediably condemn but, instead, perfectible through the use of reason and save because of their virtue and good works.

Chapter 3. Dissenters and new denominations: liberating women through the light of God

Astell represents what has been called the humanist or rational category of early modern feminists that advocated for women following Christian principles. There is another group, the one denominated prophets or enthusiasts, that encompassed women from the dissenting denominations. According to Apetrei (2010) these two categories have been considered as opposite sides,

On one side [the prophets or enthusiasts], a throng of volatile radicals, the heirs of Reformation zealotry and millenarianism; on the other [the humanists or rationalists], a company of chaste and sober ladies, poised at the turn of the eighteenth century as prototype Bluestockings. In one world, female religious expression is public and aggressive, besieging the establishment and the repressive clergy. In the other, piety is contemplative and polite, and feminism a literary battle to be waged from the seclusion of one's closet (Apetrei 2010, 34).

Although they have been traditionally seen as completely disengaged from one another, Apetrei (2010) shows that they have several points in common. Both humanists and enthusiasts found their voice through the appropriation and interpretation of Christianity, a religion that gave to all these women the idea that men and women are equals because they have both been created by God and in His image.

Thus, for these women the reason why women were kept in a subjugated position was neither holy nor defensible, but a social construction based on customs and ill-interpretations of the word of God. In other words, what kept women subjugated was a gender system that denied them full subjectivity and ways to develop their God-given abilities. For this reason, women defended that the true word of God, expressed either in the scriptures (rationalists) or through personal revelations (prophets), was that women and men participated in equal measure in His divinity and, as such, were endowed with the same duties and, in the case of dissenters, the possibility to preach (Apetrei 2010).

During this period, women from different sectarian movements produced a great number of apologetical tracks, that is, a series of documents that advocated for their right to express their faith apart from the Church of England without the fear of repercussions or persecution. In defence of their respective faiths, they also denounced the predestination ideas preached by Calvinists, in favour of a salvation that either had to be obtained by the acceptance of the Light within (Quakers) or was universal, that is,

available to all without restrictions or prerequisites, as preached by Jane Lead (1624-1704) a Philadelphian prophetess (Apetrei 2010).

These women also produced a number of texts defending their right to preach. For example, Elizabeth Bathurst (circa 1655-1691⁹¹), a Quaker and former Presbyterian, claimed that “grace was free, inward and universal, and in the same way, as she put it, ‘Women received an Office in the Truth as well as Men’ because the office of preaching was freely, inwardly and universally received” (Apetrei 2010, 219).

Hilda Smith contends that although sectarian women had a public voice, they used it primarily to defend their sectarian congregations, their male counterparts from state persecution and their own right to preach, but not “to critique the power relations of a patriarchal society” (2007, 102). For her, “Separatist women thus represented strong examples of women’s public and private religious roles, but they did not use their pulpit or congregational representation to press for greater power for women within the family or society at large” (H. L. Smith 2007, 194).

While it is true that these women’s demands did not involve their participation in the government, or extended to them the franchise of liberalism, the idea of sexual equality in reason, virtue and preaching was the germ for the fight for women’s rights. Anne K. Mellor, when evoking the women writers of Wollstonecraft’s days, explains that the “most notable efforts” to improve women’s condition came precisely from “the Dissenters, women whose religion (whether Quaker, Unitarian, or Methodist) had already granted them a degree of sexual equality based on their capacity for virtue, rationality, and religious leadership”. (2002, 152).

Radical dissenters, who later became Unitarians, deeply impacted Wollstonecraft thinking and, as Barbara Taylor states, “the network of likeminded believers in which Unitarian women moved was one of the most sexually liberal of the period, and increasingly hospitable to female aspirations. Within a quarter century of Wollstonecraft’s death it was Unitarianism that was providing many intellectual leaders for nascent English feminism” (2003, 108).

Across the Atlantic, in the United States, Quaker women would play fundamental roles both in the abolitionist efforts and the women’s movement. Judith Wellman actually states that “Just as no woman’s rights convention would have occurred in Seneca Falls in

⁹¹ Apetrei, as well as the Online Books page of the University of Pennsylvania, report that Bathurst’s death might have occurred broadly in 1691, but with no birth date. Other sources, like the Orlando project of Cambridge University, report that she might have been born around 1655 and died likely in 1685.

1848 without Elizabeth Cady Stanton, so it would not have occurred without these egalitarian Friends [Quaker women]. Stanton was the catalyst. Friends transformed the idea into action.” (2004, 92).

Thus, during the nineteenth century, it would be the heiresses of the dissenting groups that would start the first women’s movements, both in England and in the United States. Furthermore, at the turn of the twentieth century, a new Christian movement in the United States –one that once again recognizes the importance of revelation, this time through the baptism of the Holy Spirit–, would have several women at its centre and then would expand into the world, including Latin America, to ‘preach the gospel of Christ’.

3.1. Radical Unitarians and the first Women’s Movement

British modern Unitarianism developed from eighteenth century rational dissent. Unitarians, as their name indicates, do not believe in Trinity, that is, do not believe in Christ as the incarnation or son of God, but rather as a human particularly inspired by God, which is why it is worthy to follow his teachings. They were never large in numbers, but because of the importance they gave to education and their sense of social responsibility, Unitarians became involved in different liberal and progressive causes, evolving into a powerful and influential pressure group. Although they did not necessarily have a doctrinal unified system, all Unitarians shared a faith in people’s ability to develop their God-given reason through education. This approach took them into the path of science and experimentation in order to explain world (Gleadle 1998; Watts 2011).

Unitarians’ faith in reason and their support of everyone’s ability to arrive to rational conclusions were also open to women, that is, “neither women nor anyone else could be assumed to be inferior in mental capacity” (Watts 2011, 638). For this reason, Kathryn Gleadle affirms that “Unitarian women were born into a denomination which encouraged a considerable amount of respect for their intellects and judgements” (1998, 21).

As such, it is of no surprise that several of the women that advocated for women’s rights in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were Unitarians or from a Unitarian background. Mary Hays (1760-1843), who in 1791 had written a defence of the Unitarian Church, was a close friend of Mary Wollstonecraft and endorsed her ideas. In her *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*, Hays upheld “the primary equality of women, arguing that ‘God created mankind male and female, different indeed in sex for

the wisest and best purposes, but equal in rank, because of equal utility” (Mellor 2002, 144). Thus, for Hays the differences between the sexes came from men and not nature or God; and men had defied God by refusing to educate women.

Another outspoken Unitarian woman was Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825), who was educated at the Warrington Academy, a leading Dissenting school. She defended the equal rights of all the subjects of Britain, but at the same time believed in the idea of innate sexual differences and in the moral superiority of women. Therefore, she called not for a revolution in female manners, like Wollstonecraft had done, but for “a more gradual process of moral development, mutual sexual appreciation, tolerance, and love” (Mellor 2002, 154).

Kathryn Gleadle (1998) has done an extensive analysis of the relationship between Unitarianism and the feminist movement in England. She differentiates between mainstream Unitarianism and Radical Unitarianism, explaining how it was the latter rather than the former that really endorsed feminist ideas and reforms.

According to Gleadle, although Unitarians had more progressive attitudes towards women, they still held traditional customs and morals about the appropriate role and behaviours women were to have and exhibit. Thus, “while encouraging a progression in social perspectives on women, nevertheless cocooned them within conventional expectations of their characters and roles” (Gleadle 1998, 26), which mainly saw women as wives and mothers whose primary duty was to satisfy the needs of their husbands and children.

South Place Chapel and its minister, William Johnson Fox, would become the place of birth of Radical Unitarianism, which according to Gleadle differentiated from mainstream Unitarianism precisely because of its vehement and comprehensive advocacy for women’s rights which included an attack on the customs and morals that supported their oppression. They shared with other Unitarians the importance of reason and education, as well as of public duty and responsibility, but the church was frequented by people that did not necessarily identify themselves as Unitarians. What united them was that “all advocated a return to the fundamental ethics of Christianity, by emulating Christ's example”, as well as a desire to reform capitalism into a more humane practise, that is, “while supporting the development of capitalism, radical unitarians wished its excesses to be assuaged by the adoption of caring managerial practices” (Gleadle 1998, 45, 48).

Radical Unitarians then had a broad agenda of social change, and feminism, that is, the advocacy for women's rights and the fight to overcome women's degraded condition, was part of that agenda. One of the instruments they used in their quest for social reform was precisely literature. As such, figures like Mary Leman Grimstone, who published books, short stories and articles in the different journals associated with the radical unitarian intelligentsia, among which the *Monthly Repository*, dedicated their works to show how women found themselves suffering from an inferior character due to social and cultural reasons, thus opposing the common assertion of the time that women were angelic beings. The efforts in this front can be exemplified by Grimstone's work, in which she focused on the wrongs that came from women's lack of education, which was not the absence of any education, but one that placed its emphasis "on fostering beauty, rather than cultivating the intellect... designed not to develop [women's] minds and resources, but to fit them as ornamental objects, pleasing to men" (Gleadle 1998, 58-59).

It is clear that these discourses resembled both Astell's and Wollstonecraft's denunciations of women's condition and its causes. All of them placed the reason for women's degraded state precisely in the fact that they were not given the opportunity, through education, to rightly develop their God-given qualities. Radical Unitarians, in a way that was not uncommon for the time, went as far as to compare "women's position with that of the slave", defining *slave* not just in term of economical exploitation but as anyone "not granted the freedom of self-determination might be considered as enslaved" (Gleadle 1998, 63, 64).

Based on the idea that the perfect equality between the sexes had been disrupted by customs and social morals and could only be restored through education and a wider social revolution, Radical Unitarians, both men and women, started to demand not only better schooling for women but also an equal social stand. This fight included the franchise for women, changes in the status of married women and the possibility for middle-class women to work outside the house. Some even went as far as to call for a change in the family structure, maintaining "that unemployed factory men were expected to contribute to running the home, while the wives were at work" (Gleadle 1998, 186-187), in what was clearly a re-evaluation of what was considered proper not only for women but also for men.

For Gleadle, the women's movement that formally started in the 1850s and 1860s, would not have been possible without the work of radical unitarian feminists, because it was them who laid the foundation-stones by vehemently and cohesively "campaigning

for female suffrage; for reform in the legal position of women; demanding radical improvements in female education; and challenging conventional modes of domestic organisation” (1998, 189).

3.2. *Quaker Women and the Seneca Falls Convention*

Quakers⁹² or the Society of Friends is a Christian denomination that began in England in 1652, inspired by the experiences of George Fox (1624-1691). Fox, searching a response to the question of ‘How do we know what is of God?’, “claimed that direct revelation was the answer” and that “this revelation was available to everyone” (Dandelion 2008, 5). Thus, if a direct inward encounter with God and revelation is central to the Quaker belief system, and if everyone has the same access to the revelation, then men and women are considered spiritually equal and they both can preach the word of God (Dandelion 2008; Broad and Green 2009).

They also believe in the possibility of salvation for all, as long as the person recognises “the presence of this Light within the self – a light that both reveals one’s sinfulness, and yet enables one to overcome sin and to attain inner strength and peace” (Broad and Green 2009, 164). Early Friends believed they were “the true Church, God’s elect and God’s vanguard, but all could be part of the elect and attain salvation; all were spiritually equal” (Dandelion 2008, 10). This led them, both men and women, to preach and try to convert their fellows into Quakerism. For example Ana Docwra (1624-1710), a Quaker pamphleteer who wrote in defence of Protestant dissent, claimed that the Church of England had departed from the purity of reformation and that dissenters were in fact “the true protectors of the ‘*Protestant-Interest*’ of England” (Apetrei 2010, 164).

Ben Pink Dandelion⁹³ highlights how “the ministry of women, who made up 45% of the early Quaker movement, was significant for its time, and critical to the success of Quakerism” (2008, 11). As a testimony of this, we can find figures like Margaret Fell (1614-1702), who is considered one of the founders of the movement alongside Fox, for which she spent several years in prison. Fell wrote a whole defence of women’s right to speak and even a letter to the King to advocate for the peaceful nature of Quakers (Dandelion 2008; Apetrei 2010).

⁹² “‘Quaker’ was originally a nickname applied to the group because of the way they shook during worship” (Dandelion 2008, 2).

⁹³ Dandelion is a professor of Quaker Studies at the University of Birmingham.

According to Apetrei, “Quakers taught the prelapsarian equality of the sexes... and held as orthodoxy that Adam and Eve were designed to be ‘of one mind and soul and spirit, as well as one flesh, not usurping authority over each other... and the woman was not commanded to be in subjection to her husband till she was gone from the power’” (2010, 236). With the coming of Christ, that is, with the redemption of all sins including the original, men and women necessarily return to that original design, which is why Elizabeth Bathurst preached that “Male and female are made one in Christ Jesus”, because “Just as Christ pulled down the barriers between gentile and Jew, even heathen and Christian, so he had dissolved the hierarchy of the genders” (Apetrei 2010, 236, 237).

Quakers travelled to the Americas in search of religious toleration. While in Puritan Massachusetts “Mary Dyer and other Quakers were hanged in 1659 for their beliefs” (Dandelion 2008, 14), others were able to establish communities in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. By the eighteenth century there was a transatlantic Quaker community “linked by kinship and commercial ties and by a common theological understanding” (Dandelion 2008, 24). By the nineteenth century Quakers in the United States divided into different groups, commonly known as the Orthodox and the Hicksites, the first becoming more Evangelical and placing a greater authority on scriptures, and the second, more progressive, championing interior spirituality. This “encouraged Quakers to see themselves not as the true Church but as part of the true Church, that is, as part of a wider Christianity” (Dandelion 2008, 27)

Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) a Hicksite Quaker minister, along with other Quaker women and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), would play a pivotal role in the birth of the American women’s movement.

3.2.1. Quaker women in nineteenth-century United States

Although the American Declaration of Independence stated in 1776, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”, this statement did not seem to include women. Actually, as Sally G. McMillen points out, “the republican government created in 1787 accorded American women neither citizenship nor a political role in the new democratic republic” (2008, 14). The Bill of Rights, the list of ten articles added to the American Constitution in 1791 in the form of ten amendments, do not make any special reference to the rights of women.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the pervasiveness of the theory of separate spheres for men and women⁹⁴ (the public male and the private female), instead of a more liberal conception that could be expected from the nascent nation that hoisted the flags of freedom and equality, gender roles “became more rigidly defined, and expressions of patriarchy solidified” (McMillen 2008, 14).

Women in the United States would have to wait until 1920, with the ratification of the 19th Amendment, for the recognition of their right to vote. But this journey in favour of women’s rights and social equality started way before the franchise of women was recognised. In the seminal moment for the fight of women’s rights in the United States: the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and its subsequent Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, Christian principles and Quaker women played a fundamental role.

Quakers were not a monolith. As Dandelion (2008) explains, by the nineteenth century there were at least two groups in the United States, the Orthodox, influenced by Evangelical teachings on the importance of Scriptures; and the Hicksites, for whom the Inner Light was more important. The Quakers that played a fundamental role in both the abolitionist movements and in the fight for women rights were part of the Hicksite branch, as Lucretia and James Mott (McMillen 2008) or were on the fringes of the Quaker establishment, like the case of Martha Coffin Wright, Lucretia Mott’s younger sister, who, although originally disowned from the Quakers when she married a military man, always consider herself a Quaker, married with a Quaker man after her first husband died, lived in a Quaker community and raised her children as Quakers (Wellman 2004). Either way, for these Quakers the fundamental component of their religion was “an emphasis on individual conscience” and “a personal relationship with God”, where “the Bible was not the only source of religious truth” (Wellman 2004, 100).

According to Judith Wellman (2004), the Quaker women and families that were involved in abolitionist efforts and women’s rights movement shared several traits that made them particularly aware of the injustices of both slavery and women’s social condition. These families were not nuclear but networks of kin, where the links between “birth families and families created by marriage gave women as well as men a web of interlocking ties and a multiplicity of socially valued roles. No one relationship

⁹⁴ It is important to notice that the separate spheres ideology “had little to no meaning in slave and poor farm families. Most male and female slaves performed field work, and both were constantly subjected to their masters’ bidding... In free black and in many poor white families, both men and women worked hard to make ends meet. Separate spheres also had little meaning to many in rural America, where husbands and wives shared the burdens of farm life.” (McMillen 2008, 26).

overshadowed all the others” (Wellman 2004, 97). Because families were not considered in the emerging sense of just husband, wife and children, but as extended connections with kin and others, these Quakers took care of both extended family members and unrelated people, creating networks among families and making their homes not a refuge from the world but the basis of their communities (Wellman 2004).

These family structures, as well as the belief that the Inner Light was present in everyone, fostered a role for women that “functioned outside the dominance-submission model of gender relationships promoted in the larger society” (Wellman 2004, 97). In their wedding vows Quakers did not include any word that could imply female subservience (like the promise of “to obey” which was present in the wife’s vows in other protestant denominations of the time), they also defined marriage relationships in terms of mutual respect and equality (McMillen 2008; Wellman 2004). According to Both McMillen (2008) and Wellman (2004), the Mott’s marriage reflected this type of relation: it was loving, supporting and companionate. Lucretia Mott used to describe the true marital union as one where “there is no assumed authority or admitted inferiority; no promise of obedience”, hence “the independence of the husband and wife is equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal” (Mott cited by McMillen 2008, 27 and by Wellman 2004, 98-99).

Quakers were also the first Christian denomination to demand the end of slavery, so it is of no surprise that the Quaker women (and men) that would later lead the women’s rights movement had first been part of the antislavery efforts. According to McMillen “the antislavery movement did the most to heighten women’s awareness of their inferior status” (2008, 56), because women found great resistance, even rejection, to their lectures and work against slavery. The sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimké as well as Lucretia Mott started as relentless abolitionists.

Angelina Grimké (1805-1879) and her sister Sarah Grimké (1792-1873) fought uncompromisingly against slavery and through their activism “publicly challenged society’s traditional views on women” (McMillen 2008, 60). The Grimké sisters were born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, part of a slaveholding family. From childhood they both concerned themselves with slavery and after their father’s death in 1821, Sarah moved to Philadelphia, followed eight years later by Angelina. They both converted to Quakerism and by the 1830s both sisters were lecturing to mixed audiences about slavery and abolition (McMillen 2008; Reid 2013).

During the course of 1837 and 1838 Sarah Grimké wrote her most famous work, not on slavery but on the condition and rights of women: *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*⁹⁵. Using the Bible as her primary source, Sarah Grimké explained how men and women had been created as equals, both in the image of God. She also claimed that in the original sin both Adam and Eve exhibited weakness, so “They both fell from innocence, and consequently from happiness, but not from equality” (Grimké 1838, 7 (Letter I)). Thus, she concluded,

*God created us equal; —he created us free agents; —he is our Lawgiver, our King and our Judge, and to him alone is woman bound to be in subjection, and to him alone is she accountable for the use of those talents with which her Heavenly Father has entrusted her. (Grimké 1838, 8 (Letter I))*⁹⁶

She also defended women’s right to speak in public and to preach. Recurring to the Bible again, Grimké explained that when Jesus defined the duties of his followers He did not distinguish by sex or condition and that,

According to the principle which I have laid down, that man and woman were created equal, and endowed by their beneficent Creator with the same intellectual powers and the same moral responsibilities, and that consequently whatever is morally right for a man to do, is morally right for a woman to do, it follows as a necessary corollary, that if it is the duty of man to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, it is the duty also of woman. (Grimké 1838, 98 (Letter XIV))

For Sarah Grimké speaking in public was not just a right, but a Christian duty, because the right business for Christian men and women was to lead souls to Christ, and what better way of doing it than by preaching.

She also addressed directly the degraded condition of women and the theory of coverture, under which women in common law countries, i.e., England and the United States, lost their legal personality once married. Sarah Grimké opposed this legal fiction stating that in virtue of it “the very being of a woman, like that of a slave, is absorbed in her master. All contracts made with her, like those made with slaves by their owners, are a mere nullity” (1838, 75 (Letter XII)). Grimké went on to state,

The various laws which I have transcribed, leave women very little more liberty, or power, in some respects, than the slave... I do not wish by any means to intimate that the condition of free women can be compared to that of slaves in suffering, or in degradation; still, I believe the laws

⁹⁵ These *Letters* were first published in serialized form in the *New England Spectator* and in the *Liberator*. In 1838 the *Letters* were published as one.

⁹⁶ I am using the 1838 edition as digitized by the Internet Archive in 2008.

which deprive married women of their rights and privileges, have a tendency to lessen them in their own estimation as moral and responsible beings... (82-83 (Letter XII)).

It is easy to see that Grimké's arguments echoed those already posed by Astell and Wollstonecraft in regards of women intrinsic equality as God's creatures. They also mirror the Radical Unitarian's strategy of equating women and slaves. According to Charles Reid, if Sarah Grimké "succeeded in making fast the connection between slavery and coverture" then the latter "would lose its long-term viability" (2013, 1174).

These arguments and demands would clearly resonate ten years later in the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* adopted during the first Woman Rights Convention held at Seneca Falls on July 1848, even if the declaration does not make any explicit reference to Sarah Grimké's work. This could be attributed to the fact that by 1848 the Grimké sisters had long withdrawn from public activism, a fact regretted by many on the antislavery cause, including Lucretia Mott.

Lucretia Mott (né Coffin) was born a Quaker and remained one all of her life, even becoming a Hicksite minister. Her father was often away on business as a ship owner and merchant, so her mother made almost all the decisions, not only regarding their home but also the family business, which inspired in her daughter the "conviction that women could do anything they set their minds to achieve" (McMillen 2008, 5). Mott attended, along with her sisters, a co-educational boarding school, which led them to consider "themselves the intellectual equals of boys" (McMillen 2008, 35).

Mott was first an active member of the abolitionist effort. In 1833, when the newly founded American Anti-Slavery Society did not invite women to join, Mott and several other women, including her sister, Martha Coffin Wright⁹⁷, formed the biracial Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society. In 1840 she and other seven women travelled, along with several males, as American delegates to the first World Anti-Slavery Convention (McMillen 2008). According to Gleadle (1998), during her time in England Lucretia Mott met with several Unitarians, sharing with them her views on women. She also visited a Unitarian charity school for girls but was disappointed by the quality of education, which she considered "designed [only] to make good servants - not taught enough, -confined to sewing, reading, and writing and little figures" (as cited by Gleadle 1998, 25).

⁹⁷ Martha Wright and her husband were active abolitionists and their house in Auburn was "a way station for fugitive slaves escaping via the Underground Railroad" (McMillen 2008, 87).

The Anti-Slavery Convention would become pivotal for the creation of the women's rights movement in the United States, because women were excluded from actively participating in it⁹⁸.

Another woman that was present, who would later become one of the most important figures of the women's right movement in the United States, was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton was not there as a delegate herself but as the wife of Henry Stanton, one of the male delegates. Both Mott and Stanton had similar reactions to the exclusion of the female delegates, and how it was representative of women's secondary status. Thus, this Convention –particularly women's exclusion from it– became the start of a long-lasting friendship between the two, in which at first Mott served as Stanton's teacher, introducing her to the works of Wollstonecraft and the demands for women's equality, and later “transmuted itself into one of equals and collaborators in a cause” (Reid 2013, 1177).

Stanton was not a Quaker and had a particularly critical stand against organized religion and the role male ministers played in the oppression of women. Nevertheless, she seemed to have a personal interpretation of the Christian message, on that can be found in her *Woman's Bible*, published in 1895 followed by a second volume in 1898 (McMillen 2008; Reid 2013).

It would take eight years for Mott, Stanton and other three women, all of them Quakers, to call for the first Woman's Right Convention to be held at Seneca Falls on July 19 and 20, 1848.

3.2.2. *The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments*

Mott and Stanton had slightly different accounts on who and when it was suggested to hold a women's right convention⁹⁹. No matter whose idea it was, in July 1848 at the Hunts' house, a prominent Hicksite Quaker family living in Seneca Falls, five women: Jane Hunt, Mary Ann M'Clintock (Hunt's relative by marriage and member of another Hicksite Quaker family living in Waterloo), Martha Coffin Wright, Lucretia Mott

⁹⁸ According to McMillen, after a whole day of discussions “Ninety percent of male delegates voted against seating the women. As a result, the eight had to observe the proceedings from an area curtained off from the main hall, invisible and silent.” (2008, 75).

⁹⁹ According to Stanton the idea first arose in London from the exclusion they suffered at the Anti-Slavery Convention, where both her and Mott decided to hold a Convention as soon as they returned home. Instead, Mott attributed the whole idea to Stanton once they returned to the United States (McMillen 2008; Reid 2013)

(both visiting from Auburn, New York) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (who had moved to Seneca Falls with her husband a year earlier), decided to hold a Convention “to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of Woman”, while Mott was still in town (Wellman 2004; McMillen 2008).

They published the call in some local newspapers, not signing with their names but declaring that the meeting was “called by the Women of Seneca County, New York”. The invitation also spread by word of mouth, mainly in the large Quaker community, which had moved to the area from the 1820s onwards and shared an anti-slavery sentiment as well as the idea that reforms in different fronts were needed (McMillen 2008). About 300 people, some 30 men and the rest women, answered to the call, the majority of them Quakers.¹⁰⁰ According to Wellman, Quaker women responded to the call so largely and “so quickly because they had already created a strong reform network, small but efficient” (2004, 92).

The first day Stanton read the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments*, a document attributed primarily to her and which was drafted based on the American Declaration of Independence. The Declaration is divided into two parts, the Sentiments, in which the wrongs and grievances of women are enunciated, and the resolutions, which contain the ways in which those wrongs can be remedied. The appeal that men and women are equal creatures under God permeates the whole declaration. It starts in the fashion of the American Declaration of Independence, stating “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”. Then, the declaration continues marking how “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her”, citing several instances in which this has been so, i.e.,

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is

¹⁰⁰ Some members of other denominations like the Episcopalians and the Methodists also attended (Reid 2013; McMillen 2008).

compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.
(...)

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God.

These sentiments make an implicit reference to the figure of coverture, a legal fiction of the common law in virtue of which married women lost their legal personality upon marriage and were considered thereafter *femme covert*. The husband became the owner of all her properties, even her wages, and she did not have any legal action against him. Married women were not able to enter any kind of contract and for the most part, the husband became responsible for his wife's wrong doings, at least when it came to civil wrongs or torts (Reid 2013; Zaher 2002).

Although the present dissertation is not a treaty on the theory of coverture, it is important to bring to the forefront some of its characteristics as well as part of its history, because coverture is one of the greatest examples of how Christian principles were used to oppress women even in the legal realm, but also of how other Christian principles were used to try to overcome it.

According to Reid, although it has been considered that coverture had its roots in Roman, Medieval and Canonical law, it was only in early modern England that English theologians –and lawyers after them–, started to interpret the passages of the bible that refer to husband and wife becoming “one flesh”¹⁰¹ as “the essential unity of married partners, governed benevolently but unilaterally by the male” (2013, 1130). It would be William Blackstone (1723-1780) with his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* published in the late eighteenth century, who would cement the theory of coverture first in England and then in the United States (Reid 2013; Zaher 2002). According to Blackstone,

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and

¹⁰¹ Some of those biblical passages are:

Genesis 2:24 “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh”.

Mark 10:6-8 “6 But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ 7 ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh”

Matthew 19:4-6 “4 ‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a feme-covert... under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. . . .

For this reason, a man cannot grant anything to his wife, or enter into covenant with her: for the grant would be to suppose her separate existence; and to covenant with her, would only to be to covenant with himself...

(...)

If the wife be injured in her person or her property, she can bring no action for redress without her husband's concurrence, and in his name, as well her own; neither can she be sued... But in trials of any sort they are not allowed to be evidence for, or against, each other: partly because it is impossible their testimony should be indifferent, but principally because of the union of person...

But though our law in general considers man and wife as one person, yet there are some instances in which she is separately considered; as inferior to him, and acting by his compulsion. And therefore all deeds executed, and acts done, by her, during her coverture, are void... She cannot by will devise lands to her husband, unless under special circumstances; for at the time of making it she is supposed to be under his coercion... (As cited by Zaher 2002, 460)

It is clear that when the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* refers to the married woman as “civilly dead” and when it calls attention to her impossibility to own property or her wages, as well as to the fact that she is considered irresponsible if she acts in the presence of her husband, it is pointing the finger at the figure of coverture. By declaring that men and women were both created as equals and therefore entitled to the same rights and by stating in the resolutions,

Whereas, the great precept of nature is conceded to be, 'that man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness,' Blackstone, in his Commentaries, remarks, that this law of Nature being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid, derive all their force, and all their validity, and all their authority, mediately and immediately, from this original; Therefore, Resolved, That such laws as conflict, in any way, with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and of no validity; for this is 'superior in obligation to any other.'

Resolved, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.

Resolved, That woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.

(...)

Resolved, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.

These women turned Blackstone's words against himself, claiming for themselves the highest and most important right to pursue happiness, for which, using their Christian knowledge, they declared their equality as God's creatures, and demanded the derogation of all laws –i.e., the theory of coverture and all its consequences–, that did not recognize women's equality and condemned them to a secondary or subordinate position¹⁰². They also claimed women's right to act in all life's spheres, as God intended for all his human creation.

The *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* was adopted unanimously, even if at first there was some disagreement because Stanton decided to include and demand for women's right to vote (McMillen 2008).

The impact of the Seneca Falls Convention and its subsequent declaration was so great, that only two weeks later several Quaker Women decided to hold their own meeting. Mott, Stanton and Mary Ann M'Clintock were also present. In it "Participants voted to support married women's property rights, fair wages, equal access to education and employment, and greater female authority in the home and church. They approved dropping the word "obey" from marriage vows" (McMillen 2008, 96). It also produced negative reactions, particularly from some conservative clergymen who insisted "that no woman had the right to occupy the pulpit or demand equality" (McMillen 2008, 97)

Seneca Falls is considered the formal start of the women's rights movement in the United States. Some other prominent women would soon join the efforts of Mott and Stanton, like Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone. They would survive the American Civil War, and the split from the black rights movement over the issue of voting rights¹⁰³. All

¹⁰² It is important to clarify that by the time the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments was read and adopted, some States had already changed their laws regarding the property rights of married women. Mississippi did it in 1839, New York and Pennsylvania in 1848, only months before the Seneca Fall Convention. Nevertheless, the generality in the United States was that married women could not hold property (McMillen 2008).

¹⁰³ After the American Civil War, women's rights activists and black's rights activist created the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) in 1866, with the idea to fight together for the rights of all, particularly Universal Suffrage. By 1867 the Republican Party decided to support black male suffrage but not women's suffrage. Stanton and Anthony accepted the help of questionable people in order to finance and champion women's right to vote, some of which were particularly racist. The 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which states that the right to vote cannot be denied by any State on the basis of race created a division in the movement: "Elizabeth [Cady Stanton], Susan [B. Anthony], and their backers opposed the amendment because it excluded women. Lucy [Stone], [Frederick] Douglass, Abby Kelley Foster, Henry Blackwell, and Henry Ward Beecher, among others, supported it, believing that after black males won suffrage, females would be next" (McMillen 2008, 173). At the end, AERA divided in two different association: the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), created by Stanton and Anthony, and American Woman's Suffrage Association (AWSA) created by

of them died before franchise for women was finally adopted in the United States in 1920 and before all the demands consigned in the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* were met.

What this brief recollection of who and what led to the Seneca Falls Convention and its *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* aims to show, is that the movement was inspired from the beginning in the intrinsic equality of men and women as God's creatures. Thus, Christianity served as an instrument for these women to find their voice and demand changes in society and the law, not just for themselves but for all their kin.

This kind of action from Mott, Stanton and several other women, in which they were trying to accomplish the legal and social acknowledgement of their rights and those of other oppressed groups, is, for me, an example of a generative empowerment, that is, one that aimed to increase the total available power without limiting the power of other groups. Thus, it was, at least at the time I am describing, an empowerment that gave rise to a *positive sum power*, in the way defined by Magdalena León (2001), and consequently can be rightly call a feminist empowerment.

3.3. *Women Pioneers in Pentecostalism*

The spirit of reform that inspired the women's rights movement was also present in United States' religious life. Religion in general, and Christianity in particular has always been at the heart of the United States, both in colonial times and after its independence. By the second half of the nineteenth century at least two revival periods had taken place in the United States, one during colonial times, known as the Great Awakening, and another during the early nineteenth century, known as the Second Great Awakening. The later, according to McMillen, sparked "an intensity of faith and excitement that lasted for decades" (2008, 38).

Revivalism can be understood as a period of new or increased interest in "the immediacy of one's relationship with God and the importance of conversion" (Jacobsen 2006, 6). Its effects lasted throughout the nineteenth century and were felt even in the wake of the twentieth, which is why Douglas Jacobsen claims that "to a large degree, Pentecostalism is an offshoot of American revivalism" (2006, 6).

Stone, this last one approved the passage of the fifteenth Amendment. During the International Council of Women that took place in 1888 the possibility of unification of NWSA and AWSA was suggested. They finally merged in 1890 under the name National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA). (McMillen 2008)

Revivalism was concerned with remedying the ailments of American Christianity, and the perfectibility of humankind (Payne 2015, McMillen 2008). Revivalists often engaged in emotive worship, which is largely due to the fact that revivalism preached conversion, that is, a single moment in time in which the individual accepts his or her sins, repents and asks for God's mercy and opens him or herself to the transforming power of God through Jesus (Jacobsen 2006, Payne 2015).

Pentecostalism was also influenced by the holiness movement, which did not focus only on conversion but also on what came next, that is, on how to maintain a pure life and on spiritual power¹⁰⁴ (Jacobsen 2006). This focus on the power of the spirit gave Pentecostalism its main difference from other revivalist denominations or practices, because Pentecostals believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and in certain abilities that come from that Baptism, such as speaking in tongues, also known as glossolalia, prophesy and healing (Jacobsen 2006; Payne 2015).

Pentecostalism is not institutionally defined. There are many Churches in the United States and around the world that consider themselves as Pentecostals or Neo-Pentecostals, but they do not have a centralized power or way of account for membership in the way that, for example, the Catholic Church does (Jacobsen 2006). This also means that Pentecostals do not have just one founder, although its beginning is traditionally associated with two events: Charles Parham's identification in 1901 of glossolalia as the definite evidence that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit had occurred¹⁰⁵, and the Azusa Street Revival that took place in Los Angeles from 1906 to 1909, led by William Joseph Seymour, a black holiness preacher that had been Parham's student in Houston, Texas (Stephenson 2012). From the Azusa revival men and women emerged, after experiencing the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, to preach the message of Pentecostalism (Stephenson 2012).

Like Quakers, who believe that the Light within can be found in everyone, man or woman, Pentecostals preach "that the Spirit of God empowers women as well as men" (Stephenson 2012, 18), based on the promises of Acts 2¹⁰⁶. According to Lisa P.

¹⁰⁴ Some of the Pentecostal churches that exist today, such as the Church of God or the Church of God in Christ started as holiness groups that converted to Pentecostalism during 1900s (Stephenson 2011).

¹⁰⁵ With time the idea that speaking in tongues was the only proof of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was refuted. The first one to do so was Fred Francis Bosworth in 1918, although he was soon marginalized. By the last quarter of the twentieth century a large range of Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostal would adopt the idea that glossolalia was not the only proof of the Baptism. (Jacobsen 2006)

¹⁰⁶ Acts 2:4 "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them".

Stephenson this belief and the fact that some Pentecostal Churches were founded by women¹⁰⁷, “have tended to create a false sense of a burgeoning Pentecostal egalitarianism”, when in fact, “the impartial outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 has infrequently resulted in an impartial practice of ministry among Pentecostals” (2012, 21).

Stephenson claims that even during the Azusa Revival women could participate in the Lord’s gifts and in ministry as long as this was not seen as “usurping authority over men” (2012, 22), that is, as long as they stayed in their prescribed sphere. She analyses the practise of several Pentecostal churches of this first period, finding that in the majority of them women were not ordained and were not able to preach¹⁰⁸.

For her part, Leah Payne recalls that revivalist ministers, including Pentecostals, based their authority on “the call”, that is, on an ecstatic experience that gave the one who had been called the mission to serve God. Because this call came from God Himself, it “superseded all other forms of authorization” (2015, 12). The call could be felt by men and women alike, and so, because “most Pentecostals considered “the call” to be the authorizing component to the ministry” (Payne 2015, 12), it gave women access to preaching or at least teaching positions inside the different Pentecostal groups¹⁰⁹. Nevertheless, the access granted by the call did not mean authority, in fact “even with a compelling call, female revivalist ministers [including Pentecostals] were often relegated to small churches, prohibited from making doctrine or policy, and absent from positions of power in denominational leadership” (Payne 2015, 13). Which is why Stephenson states,

...while Pentecostals’ belief in the outpouring of the Spirit removed some barriers for women in Pentecostal churches, it certainly did not remove all of them. In the beginning of the movement, Pentecostals merely superimposed an ideology of empowerment over a dualistic anthropology. The outpouring of the Spirit did not affect Pentecostals’ anthropological dualism. It only complemented the ideas that were already present. (2012, 57)

¹⁰⁷ For example, the Apostolic Faith Church was founded by Florence Crawford after the Azusa Revival in 1908, and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel was founded by Aimee Semple McPherson in 1927.

¹⁰⁸ Lisa P. Stephenson in Chapter two of her book *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry: A Feminist-Pneumatological Approach*, does a detailed account of the practices of different Pentecostal churches from their foundation or conversion to Pentecostalism in the early years of the twentieth century to present days; and show how the majority of them, if not all, systematically excluded women from ministry. Some of them have kept this exclusion, while others changed their practices from 1970s onwards and now consider that both men and women are able to preach and be call to ministry.

¹⁰⁹ According to Stephenson’s work (2012), in the Church of God in Christ, one of the most representative African American Pentecostal Churches, men are the only ones who can preach, while women’s roles are circumscribe to teaching.

In this section I intend to focus on the roles that two women, Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter (1844-1924) and Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944)¹¹⁰, played in early Pentecostalism, how they overcame the gendered bias by preaching and founding their own churches, and if the strategies they used served or not to empower other women.

3.3.1. Two women that heeded the call of the Holy Spirit

Woodworth-Etter began preaching as part of the holiness movement in 1894, and even if she did not formally associate herself with Pentecostalism until 1912, she “was one of the earliest individuals to begin developing a Pentecostalist theology of the Spirit” (Jacobsen 2006, 9). From 1912 onward Woodworth-Etter became “a regular speaker on the Pentecostal circuit” (Jacobsen 2006, 20) and one of Pentecostalism most powerful leaders, with her own church in Indianapolis, Indiana. Unfortunately, although her Pentecostal theology was as foundational as those of Parham or Seymour, she “is virtually unknown outside holiness and Pentecostal historical circles” (Payne 2015, 131).

McPherson is, according to both Jacobsen (2006) and Stephenson (2012), one of the most famous and prominent Pentecostal preachers of the twentieth century. Payne (2015) accounts for the fact that even after her death, both female and male ministers fashioned their preaching according to McPherson’s style. Born in Canada, McPherson encountered Pentecostalism in 1907, when she met Robert Semple, a Pentecostal evangelist who arrived in her home town. After some meetings she converted and in 1908 she and Semple got married. They were both ordained by William Seymour in 1909 and travelled to China as missionaries. Unfortunately, Robert Semple was infected with malaria and died, leaving his young bride alone with a new-born girl. McPherson decided to return to the United States, where she married her second husband, Harold McPherson, in 1911. In 1913, after a near-death experience she decided to start preaching again. Actually, in the fashion of the call, “She claimed that on the verge of death, God asked her if she were (sic) finally willing to go into the ministry. Once she agreed, the pain in her body was instantly gone” (Stephenson 2012, 52). In 1927 she founded her own church, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

¹¹⁰ I am using the names that they were known for, which actually correspond to their husbands last names. Woodworth-Etter maiden name was Underwood and McPherson was born Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy (Payne 2015; Jacobsen 2006).

According to Payne (2015) it is surprising that these two women became so important in the Pentecostal movement. Neither of them had particular academic qualifications¹¹¹. They were both divorcees, Woodworth-Etter from her first husband and McPherson from her second, and they both married again after their respective divorces. They had several runs with the law, and both faced trial at one point or another of their careers. Nevertheless, all of this did not seem to stop them from preaching, and, as I will show, they either side-stepped these “inconveniences” or used them in their favour, to show how they actually were blessed by the Holy Spirit.

They also knew the importance of justifying their actions and themselves according to biblical teachings, because, no matter how experiential Pentecostalism seemed to be, “ultimately, everything had to be confirmed by agreement with Scripture— Pentecostals evaluated everything they heard and read in the light of the Bible—” (Jacobsen 2006, 9).

But, unlike other women of their time and even some that came before them, like Sarah Grimké, instead of engaging in arguments of whether or not the bible allowed or prohibited women from preaching and ministering, they

...put their considerable scriptural knowledge to work creating a story of their lives and ministries that engaged popular notions of 1890s and 1920s womanliness as well as the timeless biblical figures of Mother in Israel and bride of Christ. These narratives allowed the women to emphasize aspects of their lives that harmonized with ideal womanliness and ministry, and obscure those aspects that had potential to detract from their status as female ministers (Payne 2015, 62)

3.3.2. *Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter or the Mother Warrior*

Born in 1844 to a family of indigent farmers, Woodworth-Etter became a Christian at the age of 13 when she was baptized at a Disciples of Christ church service. She married at 19 with a civil war veteran and they had six children, but only the oldest, Lizzie, survived childhood. According to Payne’s account, it was the death of five of Woodworth-Etter children, particularly the last one in 1880, that led her to become a preacher¹¹². At first, she affiliated with different denominations, including Quakers and

¹¹¹ Woodworth-Etter had to leave school at an early age to help her mother make ends meet, so she only had elementary-level education and MacPherson only had a High School diploma (Payne 2015).

¹¹² “She found her inspiration to mother a congregation through her vision of her five dead children ‘shining in dazzling beauty around God’s Throne.’ ‘If mothers could see their children as I saw them,’ she wrote, ‘they would never weep for them, but would leave all and follow Jesus.’ // As she grieved the loss of her children and

Methodists, and for a long time she identified with the holiness movement, as part of which she was ordained for a short period in the Church of God¹¹³, but “after the Church of God withdrew her credentials, she struck out on her own, unencumbered by ties to any denomination” (Jacobsen 2006, 19). During her first years as an itinerant minister her first husband became a hindrance more than a helper, and so they divorced in 1891. In 1902 Woodworth-Etter met Samuel Etter and they soon got married. Etter became Woodworth-Etter’s moral and financial support (Payne 2015).

Although at first Woodworth-Etter was reluctant to join the Pentecostal movement (Payne 2015), by 1912-1913 she had become one of its most famous ministers, and she even held the camp meeting at Arroyo Seco during the spring of 1913 where Pentecostals were supposed to “debate over the nature of God and the person of Jesus. Was God a trinity of three persons, as Christianity has traditionally affirmed, or was God’s essence unitarian?” (Jacobsen 2006, 13). Although Woodworth-Etter hoped “that some new revelation or vision from God might bring everyone together” (Jacobsen 2006, 13), the matter ended up dividing the Pentecostals between a majority that upheld God’s trinity and a minority that accepted a ‘revelation’ of a Jesus-only Pentecostalism (Jacobsen 2006).

According to Payne (2015), Woodworth-Etter based her authority as a minister in the call from God and the figure of the warring mother, inspired by the biblical figure of Deborah¹¹⁴. In Judges 5:7 Deborah describes herself as Mother in Israel¹¹⁵, but not in a biological sense, but because she took care of her people and led them to victory against their oppressor. Thus, by claiming to be a mother in the same way that Deborah had been, “Woodworth-Etter was able to find a way to use her mothering skills even though only one of her children survived into adulthood” (Payne 2015, 46), and at the same time she

read her Bible, Woodworth-Etter came to understand her identity as a warring mother minister.” (Payne 2015, 45)

¹¹³ The Church of God started as part of the holiness movement and then became Pentecostal, maintaining their Pentecostal identity to this day (Stephenson 2012).

¹¹⁴ The story of Deborah is told in the Book of Judges, part of the Old Testament, in chapter 4 and 5. Deborah is described as a prophet and the one leading the people of Israel during its time of oppression by Jabin, king of Canaan and Sisera, the commander of his army. Deborah freed Israel from that oppression.

Judges 4:4-9: “⁴Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading[a] Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’⁸ Barak said to her, ‘If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.’⁹ ‘Certainly I will go with you,’ said Deborah. ‘But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.’ So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.”

¹¹⁵ “Villagers in Israel would not fight; they held back until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel.”

was able to construct an acceptable female figure of authority, “Not everyone had a female minister, but everyone had a mother, and Woodworth-Etter was her congregation’s mother” (48).

By taking the role of Deborah and not of the other mothers of the Bible, of which clearly the best known is the Virgin Mary, Woodworth-Etter was able to engage not only in the acts of nurturing and caring, but also in those of fighting for her children. Deborah was not only a prophet and a judge but, according to Judges 4:9 she accompanied Barak to the battle field, even if she did not actually participate in the battle. Thus, by portraying herself as the mother of her congregation in the same way Deborah had been a mother for Israel, Woodworth-Etter conveyed to her congregation that she was willing to fight for them and their beliefs (Payne 2015).

This construction based on biblical Scriptures, also allowed Woodworth-Etter to obscure certain aspects of her life that did not conform to the customs of the time, like the fact she was a divorcee and had remarried, because “as a mother first and foremost, the story that she constructed for herself did not include that of wife” (Payne 2015, 50). Furthermore, when she had to face the authorities for different accusations that included disturbing the public peace, embezzlement, and a public trial for obtaining money under false pretences, Woodworth-Etter used her warring *persona* to describe them as “epic battles that God helped her win” (Payne 2015, 50).

According to Payne “Woodworth-Etter showed little interest in arguments for overturning the historic ban on female pastors” (2015, 42). Jacobsen, on the other hand, presents her as a person particularly preoccupied with gender equality, stating even that “her theology of the Spirit—which includes a strong emphasis on both miracles and gender equality—shaped and continues to shape the way many Pentecostals see the world” (2006,10).

To support his affirmation, Jacobsen includes in his compilation of early Pentecostal writings a passage of Woodworth-Etter’s book *Signs and Wonders God Wrought in the Ministry for Forty Years*, first published in 1916, precisely chapter XXXIV, a sermon in which Woodworth-Etter referred to “Women’s Rights in Gospel”. In it, starting with references to the promises contained in Acts 2:16-18¹¹⁶, and citing

¹¹⁶ “¹⁶...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” In Acts 2 Peter is citing what was said by Joel, who has his own book in the Bible, so what is referred in Acts 2:16-18 is also contained in Joel 2:28-29.

other biblical passages like I Corinthians 11:5¹¹⁷ and the women that accompanied Paul in preaching and building churches, like Priscilla¹¹⁸ (Acts 18) and Phoebe (Romans 16), Woodworth-Etter defended women's right to preach based on Scriptural evidence.

Taking Phoebe's description made by Paul in Romans 16:1-2¹¹⁹, which she considered as proof that Phoebe "had authority to do business in the churches and that she had been successful in winning souls to Christ" (Woodworth-Etter [1916] 2006, 23), Woodworth-Etter justified women's authority roles in the church. She even indicated that the expression "servant of the church", used to describe Phoebe, "signifies a minister of the church" ([1916] 2006, 23). Furthermore, she attempted to take away authority from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, stating that his prescription of not letting women speak was based on the law, but her church was "not under law but under grace" ([1916] 2006, 23), and is grace, i.e., the call from God, that allows her and other women to preach.

Woodworth-Etter also pointed to the fact that throughout the Bible it is possible to find many women "prophetesses", citing as examples the cases of Huldah and Deborah. She also recalled that according to Matthew 28:5-10 "Women were called and commissioned by the Angel sent from Heaven, and by the Lord Jesus Christ, to preach the gospel" (Woodworth-Etter [1916] 2006, 24). Hence, she finally concluded with a call to women to serve God, with the following words,

My dear sister in Christ, as you hear these words may the Spirit of God come upon you, and make you willing to do the work the Lord has assigned to you. It is high time for women to let their lights shine; to bring out their talent that have been hidden away rusting, and use them for the glory of God, and do with their might what their hands find to do, trusting God for strength, who has said, "I will never leave you." (Woodworth-Etter [1916] 2006, 25-26)

Thus, it seems, at least from this excerpt, that Woodworth-Etter not only defended women's right to preach, she actually called women into action, asking them to fulfil their duty to God and to preach His word.

For unifying reasons, I am using the New International Version of the Bible throughout the present dissertation. Although it does not change the sense of her discourse, it is important to notice that Woodworth-Etter's book cited this verse as follow "Peter gets up to defend the cause of Christ. He refers to Joel 2.28-29. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Woodworth-Etter [1916] 2006, 23)

¹¹⁷ "5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head"

¹¹⁸ According to Acts 18 Paul met Aquila and his wife Priscilla in Corinth, teach them the word of the Lord for a year and a half and then they accompanied him in his travels through Syria.

¹¹⁹ "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me."

Nevertheless, her message seems to have been lost, because since her death her church has been led by men and “the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination in America and the one Woodworth-Etter was instrumental in founding, has never had more than 19 percent female ministers” (Payne 2015, 132). In fact, according to Stephenson, it was only until the late 1980s and early 1990s that the Assemblies of God “explicitly stated that God’s call to the ministry was without discretion regarding gender, race, disability, or national origin” (2012, 49), thus officially accepting women as ministers.

3.3.3. *Aimee Semple McPherson or the Bride in Distress*

All the literature I have read on McPherson seems to confirm Jacobsen’s assertion that she “was by far the most visible of all first generation Pentecostal leaders” (2006, 185). In 1909 she was ordained, along with her first husband, by Seymour himself. After her return from China, she stopped preaching for a while, but restarted in 1913 after hearing the call from God anew. In 1919 she “received ordination as an evangelist from the Assemblies of God” but that relationship “did not last long, and she returned her credentials to the denomination in 1922” (Stephenson 2012, 52). She decided to establish her headquarters in Los Angeles and there she opened the Angelus Temple in 1923. That same year she founded the Park Evangelistic and Missionary Training Institute, which in 1926 became the Lighthouse of International Foursquare Evangelism (L.I.F.E.) Bible College, today known as Life Pacific College. She was also the first woman to obtain an FCC licence to operate a radio station, starting to operate one in 1924 under the name KFSG – Kall Foursquare Gospel. In 1927 she started her own Pentecostal denomination the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, to which the radio station and the College were affiliated¹²⁰. (Jacobsen 2006; Stephenson 2012; Payne 2015).

According to Payne (2015), McPherson built her minister *persona* around the figure of the Bride of Christ. Having married young to a Pentecostal evangelist that died too soon, McPherson found solace in the bible and the intimacy that it provided with Jesus, so from that point it was relatively easy to construct a relation with Jesus “that both

¹²⁰ The radio station was operated by the Church until 2003 (Stephenson 2012). The College is still affiliated to the Church, as explained by their website: “today Life Pacific College is a four-year regionally and nationally accredited Bible college affiliated with The Foursquare Church and committed to an enduring Pentecostal mission”. <http://www.lifepacific.edu> Last accessed August 29, 2018.

captured the romantic intimacy between herself and her savior and authorized her to lead” (Payne 2015, 57).

McPherson was not the first to resort the Bride of Christ analogy. Mary Cary, the fifth monarchist, had already referred, though in a different way, to this common place in Christian tradition¹²¹ (Lilley 1992). It was also an imagery that appealed to several revivalists and “was immensely popular in the Pentecostal movement”, because “it was one of the most common images used to describe the relationship between Jesus and the church” (Payne 2015, 57).

The image of the Bride of Christ exploited both the romantic idea of early-twentieth-century literature and film industry, thanks to which McPherson was able to personify all of the womanly characteristics that were expected of her, as well as gave her authority because she was Jesus companion and could represent him,

Personalizing the biblical image authorized her ministry: as Jesus’ bride, she had a special position as his lover and confidant, which gave her power to act on his behalf. Yet sharing the bride’s role with the church enabled her to be in partnership with her congregation: they all held the same role, and the same call, and so they worked for the same purpose. (Payne 2015, 59)

This also allowed her, as was the case for Woodworth-Etter, to present the attacks against her and her trial for criminal conspiracy and perjury, as the devil’s way of charging against her, but unlike her predecessor who used the warring analogy, McPherson presented herself as the damsel in distress that needed to be rescued. Thus, “By making herself the victim and Jesus her rescuer, the story of her trial fit nicely within the frame of the bride–bridegroom narrative.” (Payne 2015, 60).

Although McPherson was particularly able to justify her ministry according to Scriptural and Christian imagery, according to Stephenson’s account she was not particularly fond of sharing the spot-light or extending to other women the power she had accomplished, and during her lifetime she restricted some positions in her Church according to gender,

...many of the offices and duties at Angelus Temple were gender specific. The reception committee was composed of women, the ushers were men, and Angelus Temple elders were all men since women could only serve as deaconesses. Moreover, McPherson did not work very well with female associates on the platform, with the exception of her mother and daughter.

¹²¹ Mary Cary’s reference to the figure of the Bride of Christ is briefly explained in the methodological chapter of the present dissertation.

Other than the female L. I. F. E. students who preached on Friday nights, women preachers only took the pulpit when McPherson was absent. When she was there, it was men alone who had this privilege (Stephenson 2012, 54)

And even if for a while it seemed that her daughter, Roberta Semple, who was herself a preacher, would inherit her mother's place as president of both the Church and the College, she left the ministry in 1936 and was removed from church leadership 1937¹²². Also, during McPherson's life time "the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel's Board", that is, its governmental body, "was comprised solely of men, while she was only the pastor" (Stephenson 2012, 55).

Nevertheless, several women graduated from L.I.F.E. College, "sought ordination and then pioneered and pastored other Foursquare churches" (Stephenson 2012, 57), among them "Ione Jefferies, Bessie Bruffet, Alice Parham, Alice LaMar, and Evelyn Thompson, although married, took the lead in their ministries and were the featured pastor in their respective churches" (Payne 2015, 134).

Also, by 1975 "the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel's official statement, "Women in Public Ministry," affirmed that the Bible demonstrates that God employs women and men equally. Therefore, the denomination sees "nothing that should restrict God-ordained and Spirit-filled ministry of women in any capacity or office of the Church."'" (Stephenson 2012, 55). Today, six of the twenty-two voting members of its Board, that is 27% of its voting members, are women¹²³.

3.3.4. Paving the way for women's empowerment through Christ

While Jacobsen (2006) seems to have a particular good impression of Woodworth-Etter's defence of gender equality, Payne affirms that,

Neither Woodworth-Etter nor McPherson showed significant interest in attaining lasting political power for themselves as women or for women in general. Neither their writings nor their actions suggest that they saw themselves as representatives for their gender or as activists for women. Although Woodworth-Etter's ministry reached its zenith concurrently with the suffrage movement... she did not campaign for the right to vote... McPherson made no special attempt to promote women's ordination (2015, 132).

¹²² It was McPherson's other son, Rolf McPherson, who inherited the presidency of both the denomination and the College, and became the main pastor of the church when McPherson died in 1944 (Payne 2015).

¹²³ According to the Church's website: https://www.foursquare.org/about/our_leadership/board_of_directors#jim_scott1 Last accessed August 29, 2018.

And in line with Payne appreciation, Stephenson, referring to the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, stated that “Having a church founded by a woman did not necessarily result in complete egalitarianism for women, since some of the restricted freedoms operating in other Pentecostal denominations were also enforced in this one” (2012, 57).

Although not entirely untrue, Payne’s and Stephenson’s judgements seem at least rushed and, in some ways, dismissive of both Woodworth-Etter’s and McPherson’s contexts.

Payne compares Woodworth-Etter’s and McPherson’s lack of public endorsement of women’s causes with the efforts made by other religious women of their respective times, like the Methodist Ana Howard Shaw, who fought for women’s right to vote, or the Presbyterian Louisa Woosley, who wrote extensively to promote women’s ordination, concluding that “gender transgression for all women for all time was... Woosley’s goal, not McPherson or Woodworth-Etter’s” (2015, 132). Payne does not seem to take into consideration that both Methodism and Presbyterianism were, by the twentieth century, well established denominations that did not need for special defence or characterization, while Pentecostalism was a nascent denomination, one that claims to have a special blessing from God through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This means that part of Woodworth-Etter’s and McPherson’s efforts went precisely to defend this new faith, one that was attacked not only because it was new, but also because it was considered fraudulent. Pentecostals claim that they are able to speak in tongues, heal people and even prophesy, all of which can be seen as a scam by non-believers. Also, in the case of Woodworth-Etter, as explained by Jacobsen (2006), her work focused on creating a theology of the Holy Spirit and ways of explaining the miracles she and her congregation experienced.

For her part, Stephenson, a Pentecostal according to her own account, when analysing the situation of different Pentecostal congregations and the ordination of women, in which she includes a brief explanation of Pentecostalism origins, bypasses Woodworth-Etter without even mentioning her or her work, and again seems to forget the early attacks that her own faith suffered.

Payne dedicates a whole chapter of her book to analysing the attacks suffered by Woodworth-Etter and McPherson, including those that involved encounters with the law. She recounts how “South Framingham’s prosecuting attorney David C. Ahearn... arrest[ed] and charge[ed] Woodworth-Etter with obtaining money under false pretenses”

after some “concerned citizens” expressed that her healing abilities “were fraudulent” and “complained about the loud meetings” (2015, 124-125). Payne also tells us about McPherson’s criminal trial in 1926, and in her conclusion recognizes that “many of their male contemporaries were also involved in controversy” (2015, 128). However, Payne does not make a connection between this persecution and the fact that Woodworth-Etter and McPherson would not dedicate a greater part of their energy to the fight for women’s right.

Could it be that Woodworth-Etter and McPherson did not focus their endeavours exclusively on women’s rights because they needed to defend first their own new faith, even from legal attack? I dare to speculate that Woodworth-Etter and McPherson, like the dissenter women in seventeenth century England, had to focus a great part of their efforts in defending their new faith. Consequently, and unfortunately, even if they had held a particularly powerful position among first-generation Pentecostals, they could not have expressed a more powerful defence of women’s social position in general and in the church in particular.

Nevertheless, their actions as founders and pastors of their own churches paved the way for new generations of women who, empowered by their example, dare to lead their own churches, even leaving their families behind (Payne 2015).

Although Woodworth-Etter’s and McPherson’s particular way of justifying their ministry, the first based on the Biblical story of Deborah and the second on the Christian figure of the Bride of Christ, only served them and no other women of their congregations in the short-run, I do not believe that their efforts can be considered only on a personal or individual level. It is true that in their times they did not achieve the sort of collective empowerment that, for example, Quaker women before them obtained in the fight for women rights. However, in the long-run Woodworth-Etter’s and McPherson’s efforts served to lay the foundations for other women that in consecutive years became pastors and decision makers in their respective congregations.

Chapter 4. “Godly prophecies”: Analysis of the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International

Pentecostalism did not remain in the United States. As part of the Evangelical tradition, it expanded around the world and particularly to Latin America¹²⁴, where it arrived as early as the 1930s (Stoll 1990; Brouwer, Gifford and Rose 1996). Colombia, although traditionally a Catholic country, did not escape this phenomenon. By 1960, as reported by David Stoll¹²⁵ (1990), Evangelicals, including Pentecostals, represented just the 0.39% of the Colombian population; but by 1985 that percentage had grown to 2.43%, that is, a growth rate of 5.2 times. According to William Mauricio Beltrán¹²⁶ (2013), by 2012 16.7% of Colombia’s population was Protestant or Evangelical, a growth rate of 5.9 times since 1985. Both the research made by Stoll and the studies made by Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford and Susan D. Rose (1996) concluded that the majority of Protestants in Latin America are Pentecostals¹²⁷. This assertion also applies to Colombia, where, as stated by Beltrán, “Protestantism is predominantly Pentecostal”¹²⁸ (2013, 99)¹²⁹.

Even if Catholicism is still the predominant religion in Colombia¹³⁰, while the majority of Catholics are mainly passive or nominal believers, Pentecostals are what is known as an active religious minority. This means that while Catholics “express a weak sense of belonging to the Church and have a scarcely participation in institutional

¹²⁴ “Since the sixteenth century, Anglo Protestants and Latin Catholics have contended for political and cultural supremacy in the New World. To avoid perpetuating that struggle, in the early 1900s European Protestants refused to classify Latin America as a mission field. As a result, the North American contribution there has swelled to unusual proportions, to most of the Protestant mission force... more North American Protestant missionaries have located in Latin America -11,196 by 1985- than in any other part of the globe” (Stoll 1990, 10).

¹²⁵ Stoll is an American anthropologist who has studied, among others, the phenomenon of Protestantism in Latin America.

¹²⁶ Beltrán is a Colombian sociologist who has dedicated his career to study religious pluralisation in Colombia, focusing particularly on Pentecostalism.

¹²⁷ “In Latin America two thirds to three quarters of all Protestants are now Pentecostals” (Brouwer, Gifford and Rose 1996, chapter one).

“By the 1960s... two-thirds of Latin American Protestants were Pentecostals and that proportion was increasing, to three-quarters by the 1980s” (Stoll 1990, 101).

¹²⁸ The original is in Spanish. “el protestantismo colombiano es predominantemente pentecostal”. This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

¹²⁹ Traditionally in Latin America and Colombia members of Christian non-Catholic churches have been known as Evangelicals or simply as Christians, an umbrella term that encompasses different denominations of Protestants, from Presbyterians to Pentecostals, and even some controversial denominations like Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons (Stoll 1990; Brusco 1995; Beltrán 2013). For the sole purpose of the present chapter, and taking on account the characteristics of the region, when I refer to Evangelicals I am referring mainly to Pentecostals, unless stated otherwise.

¹³⁰ According to Beltrán (2013) at least 70% of Colombians consider themselves Catholics.

religious rituals”¹³¹ such as Sunday mass (Beltrán 2013, 107), Pentecostals have a greater level of commitment to their Churches¹³², which reflects in a more disciplined attitude towards the guidelines and beliefs of their faiths. This greater commitment has an impact not just in Pentecostals’ private lives but also in their political participation. As such, even as a minority Pentecostals can be “even more visible and effective than the Catholic passive majorities”¹³³ (Beltrán 2013, 108). For this reason, Beltrán considers that “the Pentecostal movement, since the last decades of the 20th century, has been showing its potential to challenge the Catholic Church’s hegemony in Colombian religious sphere”¹³⁴ (2013, 19).

Beltrán (2013) and Elizabeth E. Brusco (1995), a feminist anthropologist that during the 1980s did a research in Colombia about the relation between gender and Evangelical conversion, agree on the fact that there is a numerical preponderance of women in Colombia’s Evangelical movement. For Brusco, this predominance is due to the fact that women can hold positions of significance within these religious groups, which in turn means that they influence the development of the Evangelical/Pentecostal movement with their particular female perspective¹³⁵,

To a much greater extent than in other Christian denominations, women occupy significant positions within the formal organization of these churches. They also gain prominence through the less institutionalized “authority of personal charisma” (Clark 1937; Flora 1976; Hardesty 1979; Hollenweger 1972; LaRuffa 1971; Ruether 1979; Samarín 19732). Where Pentecostalism is the result of missionary activity or develops out of (and often in opposition to) an established religion; women are often the first to convert to the new religion; their husbands may or may not be persuaded to join them later (Goodman 1972, 1973; LaRuffa 1971; Mintz 1960).

My data from Colombia support the findings of other researchers with regard to women’s prominence in the Churches. Furthermore, women’s participation has given Colombian evangelicals a “tone” or “flavor” that is distinctly consistent with Colombian femininity... (Brusco 1995, 129)

¹³¹ Católicos “expresan un débil sentimiento de pertenencia a su Iglesia y que participan escasamente en rituales religiosos institucionales”.

¹³² I referred to Pentecostal practices and faiths in the plural because Pentecostalism, as expressed in the previous chapter, is not a uniformed belief system but depends on the preaching and teachings of each Church. Nevertheless, Pentecostal denominations shared the belief in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent gifts that come from that Baptism. See: Jacobsen, Douglas (editor). *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology: Voices from the First Generation*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 2006.

¹³³ “pueden ser incluso más visibles y efectivas que las mayorías católicas pasivas”.

¹³⁴ “...el movimiento pentecostal... desde las últimas décadas del siglo xx viene mostrando su potencial para retar la hegemonía de la Iglesia católica en el campo religioso colombiano”.

¹³⁵ Different studies on Pentecostalism, including those cited in the present dissertation, show that it is a faith particularly adaptable to its context.

4.1. *The country of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Up to this day Colombia is a predominantly Catholic country. This predominance is due not only to Colombia's Spanish colonial past, where the Catholic Church ruled alongside the Spanish Crown (Levine 1981; Beltrán 2013), but also because for most of its republican life¹³⁶ the Colombian government had an official relation with the Church (Beltrán 2013). After Colombia's independence (1810-1819), due to the *Patronato Republicano*, a figure inherited from colonial times when it was called *Patronato Real*, the State had ample inherence in ecclesiastical affairs¹³⁷ and the Catholic Church and clergy acted not only as religious authorities but also as State agents, complementing or in some cases replacing the actions of an absent State (Beltrán 2013).

During the second half of the nineteenth century there was a brief period in Colombia in which the Liberal party tried to diminish the power of the Catholic Church. The government of Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera (1861-1864) started a process of expropriation of the lands and buildings that belonged to the Catholic Church, and promoted a new Constitution, adopted in 1863 and known as the Constitution of the United States of Colombia or the Constitution of Rionegro. This Constitution did not base its authority on God and declared the rights of freedom of religion and freedom of instruction¹³⁸. These series of actions were seen by the Church and the Conservative party as a direct attack against the Catholic values of Colombian Society (Beltrán 2013).

¹³⁶ Colombia, at the time known as Viceroyalty of New Granada (El Virreinato de la Nueva Granada), declared its independence from the Spanish Crown in 1810. The independence process culminated for Colombia in 1819 with the Battle of Boyacá and Simón Bolívar's triumphal entrance to the capital Santafé de Bogotá. (Revista Credencial Historia 1993)

¹³⁷ For a comprehensive explanation of the figure of *Patronato* see, among others: Cortés Guerrero, José David. "Las discusiones sobre el patronato en Colombia en el siglo XIX" *Historia Crítica*, 52: 99-122. 2014.

¹³⁸ "Art. 15. Es base esencial e invariable de la Union entre los Estados, al reconocimiento i la garantía, por parte del Gobierno jeneral i de los Gobiernos de todos i cada uno de los Estados, de los derechos individuales que pertenecen a los habitantes i transeuntes en los Estados Unido de Colombia, a saber: // 11. La libertad de dar o recibir la instrucción que a bien tengan, en los establecimientos que no sean costeados con fondos públicos. // 16. La profesión libre, pública o privada, de cualquiera relijion; con tal que no se ejecuten hechos incompatibles con la soberanía nacional, o que tengan por objeto turbar la paz pública" (I kept the original Spanish spelling and grammar).

[Art. 15. The essential base of the union of the States is the recognition and guarantee, by the general government and by the governments of each and every one of the States, of the individual rights that belong to the inhabitants and pedestrians in the United States of Colombia, namely: // 11. The freedom to give or receive the instruction that the consider pertinent, in establishments not financed with public funds. // 16. The free profession, public or private, of any religion; provided that its practice would not be incompatible with national sovereignty and that it does not intend to disturb public peace]. (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos de Colombia 1863)

It was during this liberal period that the first protestant missionaries arrived in Colombia¹³⁹. The first Presbyterian missionaries arrived in 1856, accepting an invitation from the Liberal party and by 1861 they had founded the first Presbyterian Church (Brusco 1995; Beltrán 2013). One of the strategies of the Presbyterian missions was to found confessional schools, known as *Colegios Americanos*, which became particularly important for the non-Catholic minorities, including Jews, after the adoption in 1886 of a new Constitution that gave the Catholic Church control over public instruction.

The Liberal period did not last long and was not a peaceful one¹⁴⁰. In 1886, after an armed conflict between Liberals and Conservatives, where the latter prevailed, a new Constitution was adopted. The Political Constitution of 1886 was confessional, its preamble invoked God as the supreme source of all authority, and articles 38 and 40 stated the prevalence of the Catholic Church,

Artículo 38.- La Religión Católica, Apostólica, Romana, es la de la Nación; los Poderes públicos la protegerán y harán que sea respetada como esencial elemento del orden social.

Se entiende que la Iglesia Católica no es ni será oficial, y conservará su independencia.

Artículo 40.- Es permitido el ejercicio de todos los cultos que no sean contrarios a la moral cristiana ni a las leyes.

Los actos contrarios a la moral cristiana o subversivos del orden público, que se ejecuten con ocasión o pretexto del ejercicio de un culto, quedan sometidos al derecho común.¹⁴¹

In 1887 Colombia signed a Concordat with the Vatican, which consolidated the relation between the State and the Catholic Church. This treaty stated that Catholicism was the religion of Colombia¹⁴² and gave the Catholic Church ample powers to rule over the lives of the Colombian people. Instruction was left in the hands of the Catholic

¹³⁹ Colombian society first encounter with Protestant and Evangelical influence was in 1824, due to a visit by James Thompson of the British and Foreign Bible Society. But the Arrival of Presbyterian missionaries was more influential and long lasting (Brusco 1995; Beltrán 2013).

¹⁴⁰ Beltrán (2013) reports that during the rule of the Constitution of Rionegro, from 1863 to 1886, there were more than twenty armed uprisings and three civil wars.

¹⁴¹ Article 38. The Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church is that of the Nation; the public powers will protect It and make sure It is respected as an essential element of the social order. It is understood that the Catholic Church is not and will not be official, and that it will preserve its independence.

Article 40. The exercise of all other cults is allowed as long as they are not contrary to Christian morals or laws. Acts contrary to Christian morals or subversives of public order, executed on the occasion or under pretext of the exercise of a cult, are subject to common law.

This and any other translation of Colombian legal material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

¹⁴² “Artículo 1°. La Religión Católica, Apostólica y Romana, es la de Colombia; los poderes públicos la reconocen como elemento esencial del orden social, se obligan a protegerla y hacerla respetar, lo mismo que a sus ministros, conservándola a la vez en el pleno goce de sus derechos y prerrogativas.” [The Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Religion is that of Colombia; the public authorities recognize it as an essential element of the social order, they are obliged to protect it and enforce it, as well as its ministers, while preserving it in full enjoyment of their rights and prerogatives]

Church¹⁴³, a prescription that was already part of the Constitution¹⁴⁴, and religious instruction according to Catholic principles became mandatory. The Catholic Church also received registering functions of births, marriages and deaths, as well as the management of cemeteries (Levine 1981; Beltrán 2013). Marriage was placed under the control of the Catholic Church: “civil divorce did not exist, and civil marriage for baptized Catholics was made contingent on a public declaration of abandonment of the faith” (Levine 1981, 70).

In 1902 the State and the Catholic church signed an addition to the Concordat called Convention on Missions, ratified in 1928 and 1953, in virtue of which 64% of the national territory was declared “mission territories” where the State entrusted the Catholic Church with the instruction and evangelization of the inhabitants of remote regions that had not been yet colonized. In exchange, the Colombian government promised to finance the Catholic Church endeavours in the mission territories (Levine 1981; Beltrán 2013). That same year, in the midst of one of the many civil wars between Liberals and Conservatives, this one known as *Guerra de los Mil Días*, Bogotá’s Archbishop established the rite of formally consecrating the country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a rite that was performed annually by the President until the 1990s (Beltrán 2013).

Until 1930 the government remained in the hands of the Conservative party, which guaranteed close relations between the State and the Church. However, in 1930 the Liberal party won the national elections and tried, once again, to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church. In 1936 the Constitution was reformed. Article 13 of the amendment (*Acto Legislativo 01 de 1936*), established the rights of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion¹⁴⁵; and article 14 established the freedom of education, eliminating

¹⁴³ The original article 12 of the Concordat stated “En las universidades y en los colegios, en las escuelas y en los demás centros de enseñanza, la educación e instrucción pública se organizará y dirigirá en conformidad con los dogmas y la moral de la Religión Católica. La enseñanza religiosa será obligatoria en tales centros, y se observarán en ellos las prácticas piadosas de la Religión Católica.” [In universities and private schools, in public schools and in other educational centers, education and public instruction will be organized and conducted in accordance with the dogmas and morals of the Catholic Religion. In those centres Religious education will be mandatory, and they will observe the pious practices of the Catholic Religion.]

¹⁴⁴ Artículo 41.- La educación pública será organizada y dirigida en concordancia con la Religión Católica. La instrucción primaria costeada con fondos públicos, será gratuita y no obligatoria. [Article 41.- Public education will be organized and directed in accordance with the Catholic Religion. The primary instruction paid for with public funds will be free and not mandatory.]

¹⁴⁵ “Artículo 13. El Estado garantiza la libertad de conciencia. Nadie será molestado por razón de sus opiniones religiosas, ni compelido a profesar creencias ni a observar prácticas contrarias a su conciencia. Se garantiza la libertad de todos los cultos que no sean contrarios a la moral cristiana ni a las leyes. Los actos contrarios a la moral cristiana o subversivos del orden público, que se ejecuten con ocasión o pretexto del ejercicio de un culto, quedan sometidos al derecho común. El Gobierno podrá celebrar con la Santa Sede convenios sujetos a la posterior aprobación del Congreso para regular, sobre bases de recíproca deferencia y mutuo respeto, las relaciones entre el Estado y la Iglesia Católica.” [Article 13. The State guarantees freedom of conscience. No one will be disturbed because of their religious opinions, nor compelled to profess beliefs or observe practices

the prescription that instruction had to be in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church¹⁴⁶ (Beltrán 2013).

During this liberal period new Protestant missions arrived in Colombia from the United States and Canada¹⁴⁷, and those which were already established commenced their expansion. Some Pentecostal missions arrived during this period: The Assemblies of God in 1932, establishing themselves in Boyacá and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in 1942, establishing itself in Santander (Beltrán 2013). According to Brusco, the period from 1930 to 1946 is recognized by Evangelical leaders in Colombia as “the period of the Establishment of Churches” (1995, 13). Beltrán (2013) qualifies the missions that arrived during this period as fundamentalists and recalls that they focused their efforts mainly on marginalized groups.

The liberal ruling and the murder in 1948 of liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán led to a new armed conflict between Liberals and Conservatives known as *La Violencia* (The Violence). In 1953 General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla took power through a coup d'état and ruled until 1957, when the leaders of the political parties convinced the military government to hold a constitutional plebiscite to end the violence. The plebiscite was a way of giving constitutional rank to the pact made by the leaders of the two traditional parties, in which they had decided that alternating government and guaranteeing proportional shared access to congressional and bureaucratic positions between the two was the way of achieving and maintaining peace. The plebiscite was adopted in 1958 and was known as the National Front. According to both Levine (1981) and Beltrán (2013) the pact had the blessing of the Catholic Church. In turn, the new preamble of the

contrary to their conscience. The freedom of all cults that are not contrary to Christian morals or the laws is guaranteed. Acts contrary to Christian morals or subversives of public order, which are executed on the occasion or pretext of the exercise of a cult, are subject to common law. The Government may celebrate with the Holy See agreements to regulate the relations between the State and the Catholic Church, on the basis of reciprocal deference and mutual respect and subject to the subsequent approval of the Congress]

¹⁴⁶ “Artículo 14. Se garantiza la libertad de enseñanza. El Estado tendrá, sin embargo, la suprema inspección y vigilancia de los institutos docentes, públicos y privados, en orden a procurar el cumplimiento de los fines sociales de la cultura y la mejor formación intelectual, moral y física de los educandos. La enseñanza primaria será gratuita en las escuelas del Estado, y obligatoria en el grado que señale la ley.” [Article 14. The freedom of education is guaranteed. The State will, however, have the supreme inspection and supervision of public and private educational institutes, in order to ensure compliance with the social aims of culture and the best intellectual, moral and physical education of the students. Primary education will be free in State schools, and mandatory in the degree indicated by the law].

¹⁴⁷ Because it exceeds the scope of the present dissertation, I will not enter into the discussion of the theory that viewed American Protestant and Evangelical missionaries as a strategy from the United States to impose their world view and economic organization (capitalism) in Third World Countries. For an explanation of this theory as well as a rebuke see, among others: Stoll, David. *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1990.

Constitution adopted with the Plebiscite recognized the predominance of the Catholic Church,

*En nombre de Dios, fuente suprema de toda autoridad, y con el fin de afianzar la unidad nacional, una de cuyas bases es el reconocimiento hecho por los partidos políticos de que la Religión Católica, Apostólica y Romana es la de la Nación y que como tal los, poderes públicos la protegerán y harán que sea respetada como, esencial elemento del orden social...*¹⁴⁸

La Violencia was particularly hard on Colombian Evangelicals since they were severely persecuted and denounced even from the Catholic pulpits. Many Evangelicals were killed, even by police officers and other armed forces, and their churches and schools were destroyed; “the survivors relate stories of stonings, being thrown in jail, hiding out for long periods of time in caves in the mountains, or escaping to the cities” (Brusco 1995, 38; Beltrán 2013).

However, and partially because of the persecution during *La Violencia*, in which the majority of foreign missionaries left the country and people were forced to keep their worshipping hidden, this period and the relative peace that came afterwards saw an explosion of conversion and consolidation of Evangelism in Colombia. Brusco, based on a report made by Sepal Colombia¹⁴⁹, indicates that for Evangelical leaders “The period during *La Violencia*, from 1946 to 1960, during which the movement really started to take off is called the Period of Awakening. After 1960, when relative peace was restored, came the Epoch of Organized Evangelization” (Brusco 1995, 19). And Beltrán reports that “only *La Violencia* —and its impact in terms of pastors murdered and attacks on Protestant infrastructure— allowed for the consolidation in 1950 of a national Protestant association: the Colombian Evangelical Confederation (Cedec)”¹⁵⁰ (2013, 72).

The fact that foreign missionaries left the country, combined with the fact that there were few formal theological schools for training new pastors, favoured the creation of independent and new Pentecostal and Evangelic Churches in Colombia (Beltrán 2013). According to Jacobsen “Pentecostalism is rightly known for its adaptability and innovation in the areas of religious practice, communication technology, cultural

¹⁴⁸ “In the name of God, supreme source of all authority, and in order to strengthen national unity, one of whose bases is the recognition made by the political parties that the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Religion is that of the Nation and that as such, public authorities will protect it and will make it respected as an essential element of social order ...”.

¹⁴⁹ Sepal Colombia is a parachurch organization that brings together several Evangelical leaders.

¹⁵⁰ “solo la *Violencia* —y su impacto en términos de asesinatos de pastores y atentados contra la infraestructura protestante— permitió consolidar en 1950 una asociación protestante nacional: la Confederación Evangélica de Colombia (Cedec)”

assimilation, and organizational structure” (2006, 1). It is this plasticity or adaptability that allows both Stoll (1990) and Beltrán (2013) to claim that in Latin America Protestantism in general and Pentecostalism in particular are not the cultural implant that they once were. Pentecostals in Colombia founded and now run their own churches, in which they have included, advertently or inadvertently, elements from popular Catholic religiosity and indigenous religious practices (Beltrán 2013).

By the 1960s there were several autochthonous Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Colombia, alongside those founded and dependant on foreign denominations (Beltrán 2013). Nevertheless, it would take until 1991, with the call for a National Constituent Assembly and the subsequent new Political Constitution for freedom of religion to be recognized in Colombia as a fundamental right,

Artículo 19. Se garantiza la libertad de cultos. Toda persona tiene derecho a profesar libremente su religión y a difundirla en forma individual o colectiva.

Todas las confesiones religiosas e iglesias son igualmente libres ante la ley.¹⁵¹

Following the adoption of the new Constitution, the Constitutional Court declared in 1993 that several parts of the Concordat were unconstitutional, particularly those articles that referred to the prerogatives of the Catholic Church in matters of instruction and education¹⁵². A year later the Constitutional Court also declared unconstitutional the official rite of annually consecrating the country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for considering it against the recognition made by the Constitution of full religious freedom and equality among all religious confessions¹⁵³.

Nevertheless, there is still a cultural predominance of Catholicism, and “although the process of religious pluralisation has allowed the recognition of the rights of some religious minorities, especially of Protestant minorities, mechanisms of discrimination of Catholic majorities towards religious minorities and of the religious minorities with each other still remain”¹⁵⁴ (Beltrán 2013, 118). It was only in the 1990s that religious conversion and the changes it represented started to be considered more than a marginal

¹⁵¹ “Article 19. The freedom of cults is guaranteed. Everyone has the right to freely profess his or her religion and to spread it individually or collectively.

All religious denominations and churches are equally free before the law.”

¹⁵² Sentencia C-027 de 1993. M.P. Simón Rodríguez Rodríguez.

¹⁵³ Sentencia C-350 de 1994, M.P. Alejandro Martínez Caballero.

¹⁵⁴ “si bien el proceso de pluralización religiosa ha permitido el reconocimiento de los derechos de algunas minorías religiosas, especialmente de las minorías protestantes, subsisten mecanismos de discriminación de las mayorías católicas hacia las minorías religiosas y de las minorías religiosas entre sí”

phenomenon (Beltrán 2013), and it has been during the first two decades of the twenty-first century that its impact has been felt.

The influence and power of Evangelical denominations was felt during the referendum held in 2016 to approve the peace agreements between the Colombian government and the Farc¹⁵⁵ guerrillas. Several Evangelical Churches denounced the agreements for considering them full of “gender ideology” and an attack “on the traditional family”, as reported by several national and international news media. Only a few Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, among which *Casa sobre la Roca* and the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International (CGMJCI) openly supported the agreements. At the end the referendum was lost by a close margin, and of the 50,2% of voters that voted against the peace agreements, it is estimated that at least two million were Evangelicals¹⁵⁶.

It was in this particular context of bipartisan violence and religious intolerance that the denomination under analysis, the CGMJCI, was founded and has since developed over the years.

4.2. A Colombian Pentecostal Church

The CGMJCI was founded by Luis Eduardo Moreno in 1972. Before founding his own church, he and his wife (the current leader of the Church, María Luisa Piraquive de Moreno) were part of other Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations. In his youth Moreno had been part of the *Iglesia Cristiana Independiente*, and when he met Piraquive he was a Pastor at the *Iglesia Pentecostal*. Some years after getting married they joined the *Iglesia de Dios* and after that the *Iglesia de la Profecía*. For some time before formally founding their own church the Moreno-Piraquive family had been praying in their own house without ties to any denomination (Piraquive de Moreno 2017). As seen in the

¹⁵⁵ Farc stood for Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia.

¹⁵⁶ W Radio. “El rol de las iglesias cristianas evangélicas en la victoria del “No” en el plebiscito” in <http://www.wradio.com.co/noticias/actualidad/el-rol-de-las-iglesias-cristianas-evangelicas-en-la-victoria-del-no-en-el-plebiscito/20161005/nota/3265407.aspx>. Last accessed September 6, 2018.

Revista Semana. “Los pastores del No a los que no les gustó el nuevo acuerdo” in <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/los-pastores-del-no-inconformes-con-el-nuevo-acuerdo-de-paz/505689>. Last accessed September 6, 2018.

El País. “El voto evangélico, clave en la victoria del ‘no’ en el plebiscito de Colombia” in https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/10/12/colombia/1476237985_601462.html. Last accessed September 6, 2018.

Revista Semana. “Los cristianos que siempre apoyaron los acuerdos de paz entre las Farc y el Gobierno” in <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/los-cristianos-que-siempre-apoyaron-la-paz/551957> Last accessed September 6, 2018.

previous chapter, moving from one congregation to another, at least in the early stages, is not unusual among Pentecostals, both Woodworth-Etter and McPherson did the same before starting their own churches (Jacobsen 2006; Payne 2015).

According to Piraquive's autobiography they started the denomination because one night, while they and some friends were praying, God manifested himself through her and gave them the order to establish a new Church as well as the promise that the new denomination would be particularly prosperous,

From this small fold I will raise a very large church, where I will manifest, I will make it prosper, I will bring the souls...

(...)

This is My church that I will raise, it will be greatly prospered, I will gather and bring all the sheep to this fold... I will give to all these sheep life in abundance, peace, joy and happiness.

(...)

Every person who enters My place will be materially blessed, so they would believe that I manifest Myself in the Church, I will bring those who have to be saved, I will manage My Church and it will grow in many places in this country and abroad... you have to be independent from all other congregations, because you cannot submit to human laws and ordinances, My Spirit will guide you, direct you and teach you all things.¹⁵⁷ (Piraquive de Moreno 2017, 43-47)

As previously explained, for Pentecostals, mainly in the first stages of the denominations, the call from God is particularly important, because it is what gives the pastor or minister the authority to preach and lead the congregation (Payne 2015).

Max Weber differentiates between two types of religious leaders, the *priest* and the *prophet*. The *priest* bases his/her authority in the fact that he/she is part of an established religious tradition, precisely like catholic priests do. The *prophet*, rather, bases his/her authority in personal revelation and charisma. Thus, the personal call is what distinguishes the prophet from the priest (Weber 1963; Stephenson 2011; Beltrán 2013). Charles Barfoot and Gerald Sheppard, as cited by Stephenson (2011) claimed that prophetic authority was particularly present in the first stages of American Pentecostalism, where even women were able to access it and be welcome as leaders of

¹⁵⁷ “De este pequeño redil levantaré una iglesia muy grande, donde me manifestaré, prosperaré, traeré las almas (...)

Esta es mi iglesia que voy a levantar, será grandemente prosperada, recogeré y traeré a todas las ovejas a este redil... a todas estas ovejas les daré vida en abundancia, paz, gozo y felicidad.

(...)

Toda persona que entre a Mi lugar será bendecida materialmente para que crea que Yo me manifiesto en la iglesia, traeré a los que han de ser salvos, manejaré Mi iglesia y crecerá por muchos lugares en este país y en el extranjero... tienen que ser independientes de las demás congregaciones porque vosotros no podéis someteros a leyes y ordenanzas humanas, mi espíritu los guiará, los dirigirá y les enseñará todas las cosas”

their own communities. However, when the movement and churches started to consolidate prophetic authority was replaced by priestly authority, in which women were not welcomed. Stephenson re-evaluates Barfoot's and Sheppard's findings and claims that more than a temporal distinction between the two types of authority, which exists inside the Pentecostal movement is actually "two types of ecclesial functions and their concomitant authority", and that women's ministry is best understood "when the simultaneous existence of the prophetic and priestly functions are recognized" (Stephenson 2011, 412)

Although Stephenson bases her analysis on American Pentecostalism, it is possible to use some of her findings when analysing the CGMJCI and its current female leader. Throughout Piraquive's autobiography one of the elements that is recurrently repeated and highlighted is the fact that both her and her husband received God's call. In fact, the prologue starts by stating that God placed His ministry in the same way and with the same prerogatives in both Moreno and Piraquive,

It is not a simple task to deal with the depths of God, nor is it when it comes to describing the majestic manifestation of His power, in those to whom He made His call in the year 1979 (sic), to deposit His ministry on them, our brother Luis and our sister María Luisa. As equal in importance; since from the beginning of the Church of God they were in the same spiritual condition and had the common call from the Lord.¹⁵⁸ (Baena López 2017, vii)

There are also several moments throughout her autobiography in which Piraquive recalls being given prophesy about her ministry and Moreno's ministry, either by other prophetesses or by God himself. Those prophesies accounted for a shared ministry, "the Lord is going to give you a very big ministry, great is that ministry and it is for the two of you ... the people are converted by the word that you will preach; the ministry belongs to you two"¹⁵⁹ (Piraquive de Moreno 2017, 14).

Georges Gusdorf considers that "autobiography is the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (2014, 33)¹⁶⁰. In this case, the image that reflects in the mirror of Piraquive's work is a carefully created one that gives her the authority to

¹⁵⁸ "No siendo tarea sencilla ocuparse de lo profundo de Dios, tampoco lo es cuando se trata de describir la majestuosa manifestación de su poder, en aquellos a quienes hizo su llamamiento por el año 1979 (sic), para depositar allí su ministerio, nuestro hermano Luis y nuestra hermana María Luisa. Como iguales en importancia; pues desde el principio de la Iglesia de Dios se encontraban en la misma condición espiritual y tenían el llamamiento común de parte del Señor"

¹⁵⁹ "El Señor les va a dar un ministerio muy grande, grande es ese ministerio y a es a ustedes dos... la gente se convierte por la palabra que ustedes predicarán; el ministerio es de ustedes dos"

¹⁶⁰ Gusdorf's text was originally published in 1956. In the present dissertation I am using the translation of his essay by James Olney published in 2014.

preach and actually lead the CGMJCI. By recounting with great detail every instance in which her or her husband were supposedly called by God, she is constructing their authority, and particularly her authority, as leader of the denomination. An authority that is then primarily prophetic.

It is interesting that part of the book reflects the disagreements Piraquive had with her husband on this matter. There is one particular incident in which Moreno actually tells Piraquive that she has no ministry and that the Church was going to get rid of her after his death, a reason for which he forbade her outright to speak or teach in the Church. Piraquive explains these instances as attacks from the devil, who was using her husband's jealousy against her, and turns the situation in her favour describing how God told her to be patient because He would be heightening her position in the Church.

Piraquive's autobiography is primarily directed to the members of the Church so it is possible that retelling these disagreements and casting them as attacks from the devil, might actually be a strategy, on several levels, on her part. What she recounts happened in the recent years and it was only until the late 1990s, after her husband's death, that she took the reins of the Church. Therefore, it is likely that several Church members remember that she was not able to preach and the instances in which her husband denied her ministry. One of the women I interviewed, who has been a member of the CGMJCI since childhood, told me that "It was a church that came from a tradition where the man is the one who preaches, the man is the one who is in charge. In fact, the Lord allowed me to be in that time and meet the husband of Sister Maria Luisa, Brother Luis. The Sister even though she had the same responsibility, she never, never made it known, because at that time it was all focused on the man"¹⁶¹.

Thus, she cannot hide or deny the fact that while her husband was alive, women, such as herself and in general, did not have any authority in the Church. However, by casting it as an attack of the devil, affirming that the Holy Spirit told her "the devil is using you husband because he wants to destroy the Church, your home and your spiritual life"¹⁶² (Piraquive de Moreno 2017, 110-111), Piraquive is able to remove the focus from her husband's attitudes, justifying his behaviour not in a shortcoming on his part, but on temptations and actions beyond his sphere of control. Furthermore, she also reinforces

¹⁶¹ "Era una iglesia que venía de una tradición donde el hombre es el que predica, el hombre es el que lleva a cargo. De hecho, el señor me permitió estar en ese tiempo y conocer al esposo de la hermana María Luisa, al hermano Luis. La hermana a pesar de que tenía la misma responsabilidad, ella nunca, nunca lo dio a conocer, porque en ese momento era todo enfocado en el hombre."

¹⁶² "El diablo está usando a tu esposo, porque quiere destruir la iglesia, tu hogar y tu vida espiritual"

her allegedly close relation to God: it is the Lord who gave her the strength to patiently bear these attacks from the devil, who is using her husband's weakness to undermine her.

Hence, Piraquive is able to actually reinforce and not weaken the call that gives her prophetic authority. If God continued to call her to His service, even when her husband, the original leader of the church told her not to preach, it is because He actually wants her as His maidservant¹⁶³. She actually writes that the Holy Spirit gave her this message, “daughter keep going, do not worry, things will not be as you think, be patient to my son because he is jealous ... I will put you in high places, I will prosper you, I will bless you in a great way, when you are in those high places everyone will listen to you, everyone will applaud you, everyone will respect you” (Piraquive de Moreno 2017, 116).

The CGMJCI declares in its statement of faith that “the main spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit that operates in Church is the gift of prophecy (sic), through which God guides people's lives”. Thus, claiming a recurrent call from God is particularly useful when it comes to justifying authority.

Based on an analysis of her autobiography, the sermons made by the pastors of the CGMJCI and the interviews to the members of the Church, I propose, following Payne's analysis of Woodworth-Etter and McPherson (2015), that Piraquive sustains her authority in the image of God's maidservant, a *persona* which allows her to claim that her actions are just her following God's orders, and that feeds on gender stereotypes, because a maidservant is precisely one that serves and takes care of others, a role traditionally assigned to women.

4.2.1. *God's Maidservant*

As Pentecostalism is based in the promises contained in Acts 2:17-18, where Peter repeats Joel's prophesy that “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out

¹⁶³ Maidservant is the actual word the English website of the CGMJCI uses to describe a female servant of God. According to the Oxford English Dictionary maidservant is a dated noun that means “a female domestic servant”. It is a term commonly used in some Bibles, like King James Version or the American Standard Version, to refer to a female servant or a woman that serve God. Another term commonly used in those translations to refer to a female servant of God is that of *handmaiden*. I use the term maidservant, even if outdated, because it is the one used by this denomination.

my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy”¹⁶⁴, grounding a minister’s authority in the figure of the female servant may not be particularly original but, as I will show, it has proven particularly effective in Piraquive’s case.

Although the CGMJCI’s Statement of Faith starts by claiming the importance of the Bible as a book authored by God¹⁶⁵ and that during sermons the Bible is called upon constantly; one element that is exceptionally absent from Piraquive’s autobiography is precisely that of the references to the Scriptures. Instead, it is full of references to dreams and prophesies experienced by herself, other Evangelicals (before the foundation of the CGMJCI) and other members of the Church, in which her and her husband’s roles are revealed.

The CGMJCI gives particular importance to the ways God manifests in people’s lives. Their Statement of Faith declares “That God manifests Himself to Church through prophecy, visions, and dreams” and one of the sermons I attended was precisely focused on understanding that God speaks in a particular way. The sermon was called “What does it mean You revealed it to my ear?”¹⁶⁶, and according to the preacher, based on several biblical passages, namely Job 33:14-16¹⁶⁷ and Numbers 12:6-8¹⁶⁸, the only way God reveals himself is through prophesy, that can be written, that is, on the Bible, or spoken, as told by the prophet of the Church; dreams, and visions.

With these explanations in mind, reading Piraquive’s autobiography takes some new meanings. Beyond the fact that her account may seem fantastical or esoteric, the telling of her *Vivencias*¹⁶⁹, as the book is called, follows what Teresa del Valle calls milestones, that is, “those decisions, experiences, that when remembered constitute a significant reference”¹⁷⁰ (1995, 285). In Piraquive’s case, the milestones are essentially the revelations from God in the form of dreams, visions and prophesies. She does not

¹⁶⁴ These verses correspond to the New International Version of the Bible, other versions, as the King James speaks of servants and handmaidens.

¹⁶⁵ “Based on the Bible, as the written word of God, we believe: // That the Bible was inspired by God. He was its only author given that He revealed His message to the Patriarchs, prophets and apostles, by way of whom it was written;” CGMJCI’s Statement of faith https://idmji.org/statement_of_faith_post/ Last accessed September 7, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ “¿Qué significa me lo revelaste al oído?”

¹⁶⁷ ¹⁴ “For God does speak—now one way, now another— though no one perceives it. ¹⁵ In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, ¹⁶ he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings”

¹⁶⁸ ⁶ he said, “Listen to my words: “When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams, ⁷But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?””

¹⁶⁹ The literal traslation of *vivencias* is experiences, but the English word does not translate the sentiment behind the Spanish name, which does not only mean an event or occurrence, but something deeply lived and felt.

¹⁷⁰ “Aquellas decisiones, vivencias, que al recordarlas se constituyen en una referencia significativa”.

dwell much on her early years and the fact that she must have closely experience *La Violencia*, her life seems to start the moment she moves to Bogotá and particularly when she meets Moreno and marries him. Although it is a retrospective story of her own existence in the terms Lejeune defines an autobiography (1986), the accent is not placed in her as an individual, but in the moments when God told her she was going to serve Him, that is, in her as God's maidservant.

Piraquive claims that she started hearing God in her childhood dreams, in which Jesus asked her to help him choose the souls for His kingdom. But it was only when she was already married with Moreno and living an Evangelical life that God revealed to her several promises and demands. Early on He told her, "I would be using You with the gift of prophesy"¹⁷¹ and then recriminated her, through the use of another Christian prophetess, because she was not using his gifts, "The Lord gave you the gift of laying hands and you are not using it, if you don't obey on day the Lord will ask you to leave his side"¹⁷² (Piraquive de Moreno 2017, 13, 18). Throughout the book the calls from God to do his bidding are repetitive, as are the warnings that if He is not obeyed He will withdraw His blessing and the prophecies would not be fulfilled.

In following God's word, she also performed the role of wife and mother happily and selflessly. Piraquive describes how she found joy in everyday tasks like cooking and cleaning. She does not complain about the fact that she could not finish her studies or find a job, because her husband did not allow her to do either thing, instead she claims that God ordered her to study "because important and studied people will come to the church so that you do not feel self-conscious when talking with them"¹⁷³ (Piraquive de Moreno 2017, 68). She also declares that it was God who gave her the time and financial resources to study and that is was Him who found her a job¹⁷⁴. Piraquive portrays herself as a self-

¹⁷¹ "Te usare con el don de profecía"

¹⁷² "El Señor le dio a usted el don de imposición de manos y usted no impone manos, y si no obedece, un día el Señor le dirá apartaos de mí"

¹⁷³ "porque a la iglesia llegarán personas importantes y estudiadas a fin de que al hablar con ellas no te sientas acomplejada".

¹⁷⁴ "Dios me facilitó el tiempo y los recursos para estudiar e hice mi bachillerato por radio y un curso de inglés, me gradué en 1988. Más adelante investigué sobre la Universidad a Distancia, me inscribí e la Universidad de la Sabana y comencé mi carrera; me gradué en 1993 como Licenciada en Educación con especialidad en Lingüística y Literatura. Un día en oración El Señor me dijo que me iba a proveer un trabajo... fue así como me fui a trabajar a un colegio, cuyos propietarios eran unos hermanos de la Iglesia y durante tres años estuve enseñando español y literatura" [God gave me the time and resources to study and I finished my high school on radio and took English lessons, I graduated in 1988. Later I researched about the distance learning University, I enrolled in the *Universidad la Sabana* and began my career; I graduated in 1993 with a Bachelor of Education with a specialty in Linguistics and Literature. One day while praying the Lord told me that he was going to provide me with a job ... that's how I went to work at a school, whose owners were brothers of the Church and for three years I taught Spanish and literature].

denying wife, one that resignedly waited in God's time and patiently endured her husband's mistreatments because she knew that it was the work of the devil.

This does not mean that Piraquive's carefully created *persona* does not let her frustrations come to light. In fact, in one revelling phrase Piraquive declares that when her husband died she "felt autonomous", that is, in his absence she finally felt free (2017, 129). These little moments give the readers a glimpse into Piraquive's true self. As Ana Teresa Torres (2003) explains, the author (social person) and the writer (the subject of writing) are not necessarily the same person because writing is always mediated by discourse and the text is always subject to the interpretations of the readers. Therefore, as much as the author tries to control the text, the text has its own voice. In the case of Piraquive, as much as she tries to obscure the difficult relation she had with her husband, the truth is that by reading her *Vivencias* it is clear that Moreno limited her actions and that she resented him for it. Nevertheless, she also manages to redirect the discourse to God's calling and to her actions to dutifully obey Him.

The moral of the story seems to be that for all Piraquive's services, patience, abnegation and obedience God rewarded her and turned her into the "worldwide leader of the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International"¹⁷⁵.

But not only is Piraquive the current leader of the Church, she is also venerated as the true maidservant of God, to whom He reveals His doctrine "as a result of His calling". Every CGMJCI's temple I have visited has a blackboard where Piraquive's activities and accomplishments are published. Piraquive is the only one that gives Doctrine, that is, the only one with authority to interpret the Bible. As such, biblical studies consist in watching videos of her preaching around the world, and if the parishioners cannot attend Bible studies at the different temples, they can find the videos uploaded onto the Church website. She controls all of the CGMJCI's assets and money, claiming that God told her that only the one with ministry could manage said funds.

Described as such, the CGMJCI seems to function like a sect. As Piraquive portrays herself as someone who is willingly and faithfully obeying God's will, it seems that the members of the Church are expected to follow her words and example in the same manner. In the interview Sister Miriam told me that "During bible study Sister María Luisa has taught me to Love God, to be near God every day and to obey like the Sister

¹⁷⁵According to the description of her in the Church's official website <https://idmji.org/en/> Last accessed September 9, 2018.

has always taught us”¹⁷⁶. In this sense, although the leader of the CGMJCI is a woman, the empowerment of other women through the teachings of this particular Pentecostal Church may be hindered because of its emphasis on obedience and the fact that any rotation of power can be seen as an attack on Piraquive’s figure.

However, a slow process of what Beltrán (2013) calls institutionalization and bureaucratization is happening inside the CGMJCI. There is more or less a hierarchical structure rising that does not necessarily depend on charisma or on family ties with Piraquive. Also, the great importance that the CGMJCI gives to prophesy, combined with its national and international¹⁷⁷ expansion, makes it impossible for Piraquive to control and minister the different gifts from God. This opens a door for other women to act inside the Church and, according to the interviews I did, as much as 80% of the people *ministering* the different gifts (laying hands, healing, prophesy, among others), are women. Also, since Moreno’s death, the doctrine of the CGMJCI has changed and now they consider that women and men can fulfil the same duties, including preaching.

4.2.2. *Hearing the Call and Following the Example: Empowerment of the Church’s Women*

According to Piraquive’s *Vivencias* and some of the testimonies that Church women gave me during the interviews, since the 1990s God promised that men and women would be fulfilling the same kinds of duties within the Church, “The Holy Spirit always told me that He would be supporting me, that I had Ministry, that He would use women as well as men and that this would be proven in a not too distant time”¹⁷⁸ (Piraquive de Moreno 2017, 100). In this regard Sister Adriana’s words are revealing,

¹⁷⁶ “En los estudios bíblicos la hermana María Luisa me ha enseñado a amar a Dios, a acercarme cada día a Dios y a obedecer como siempre nos enseña la hermana”.

¹⁷⁷ According to the CGMJCI website, they have temples all around the world, from Argentina and Australia, to several European countries and the United States. It is possible to access their website in Spanish, English, French and Italian. Just in Italy they have 7 Churches with services all week-long and 3 Churches that are starting with teaching cults every Sunday. It is possible to see the list of their locations at their website <https://idmji.org/locations/> Last accessed September 11, 2018.

Although the common belief is that these Churches only serve migrant communities, the fact is that they see themselves, as recognized by Claudia Währisch-Oblau (2009) in her study of Evangelical/Pentecostal Churches from the global south in Germany, as missionaries with the duty to spread the true Gospel all around the world. In the CGMJCI temple in Milan I saw at least six Italians attending the meetings regularly, and at least one of them gave her testimony during cult on how God had blessed her. The CGMJCI, at least the temple I visited, has simultaneous translation systems and the hymns are starting to be sung in Italian. For a deeper analysis of this phenomenon see Währisch-Oblau, Claudia. *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/ Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe: Bringing Back the Gospel*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. 2009.

¹⁷⁸ “El Espíritu Santo siempre me decía que me estaría respaldando, que yo tenía Ministerio, que Él usaría a las mujeres igual que a los varones y que esto me lo estaría comprobando en un tiempo no muy lejano”

I remember from my childhood that the Lord made promises that He would be using woman in the same manner as man. In fact, He made very big promises that came true many years later. 20 years later. Let's say that the starting point of what is really the role of women in the Church I could say it was from the moment God gave Sister Maria Luisa the reins, with the departure of Brother Luis. That is the moment in which God materialized the promises he had made and she [Sister María Luisa] has been the first example of that role of the woman in the church, which is the same as the man.¹⁷⁹

The CGMJCI justifies this change affirming that doctrine can be dynamic because it can change if the Holy Spirit reveals it. In this way, Carlos Eduardo Baena, in the prologue to Piraquive's autobiography, explains different practices in which the doctrine has evolved, including the possibility of women to preach,

Regarding woman and preaching, it is considered a mystery that the Holy Spirit did not make clear to Brother Luis in life, what we enjoy today. He understood that they [women] would speak to people about God, but they would not go up to the pulpit. Later, that is to say, after his departure, the Lord came to clarify things about it, demonstrating once again that we can leave for eternity without understanding many things; with Sister Maria Luisa the possibility was opened for women to preach in the Church, because it was revealed to her by the Holy Spirit and there are some sisters who have already done so in the Church. In this sense, Sister Maria Luisa is a pioneer, following a path that deprived women of any possibility. Now we are in the presence of the female preachers, who, with their testimony and their teachings, enrich the Church of the Lord.¹⁸⁰ (Baena López 2017, xx-xxi)

Believing that doctrine can change with time can be seen as what Daphne Hampson identifies with the *Kairos* approach. The latter “allows people to say that God is indeed involved in history and continues to be involved, bringing about in time something new”, it also “apparently allows it to be said that the past has not been at fault; it is simply that God moves with humanity into a new age” (Hampson 1990, 23).

¹⁷⁹ “recuerdo desde mi niñez que el señor hacía promesas que Él estaría utilizando a la mujer igual. De hecho, hacía promesas muy grandes y eso se ha venido cumpliendo muchos años después. 20 años después. Digamos que la partida de lo que en verdad es el rol de la mujer en la iglesia lo podría decir que fue a partir de que Dios le da las riendas a la hermana María Luisa, con la partida del hermano Luis. Ese es el momento en que Dios ya materializa esas promesas que había hecho y ella ha sido el primer ejemplo de ese rol de la mujer en la iglesia, que es igual que el hombre”

¹⁸⁰ “Frente a la mujer y la predicación, se tiene por misterio que el Espíritu Santo no le aclaró en vida al Hermano Luis, lo que hoy gozamos. Entendía que ellas le hablarían a las personas acerca de Dios, pero no subirían al pulpito. Más adelante, es decir, después de su partida, el Señor entró a aclarar las cosas al respecto, demostrando una vez más que podemos partir hacia la eternidad sin entender muchas cosas; con la Hermana María Luisa se abrió la posibilidad para que la mujer predique en la Iglesia, porque así se lo reveló el Espíritu Santo y hay algunas hermanas que ya lo han hecho en la iglesia. En este sentido, la Hermana María Luisa es pionera, recorriendo un camino que privaba a la mujer de cualquier posibilidad. Ahora estamos en presencia de las predicadoras, que con su testimonio y con su enseñanza, enriquecen la Iglesia del Señor.”

The *Kairos* approach is consistent with a religious practice like Pentecostalism that believes that God still manifests in this age by different means. Pentecostalism is not original in this approach, Quakers also believed in the power of revelation, that like the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, can come to anyone that has accepted the Light within. Pentecostalism, however, always searches for confirmation in the Bible (Jacobsen 2006), because it is considered to be the word of God.

In the case of the CGMJCI this approach has its limits, because its members believe that God reveals the proper doctrine only to the Ministry, that is, only to Moreno and Piraquive. As such women had to wait until Moreno's death and Piraquive's leadership to be able to hold, at least in theory, all the authoritative roles the CGMJI offered.

All the women I interviewed saw Piraquive's leadership as an example and called onto the fact that God had revealed to her that women and men were meant to fulfil the same duties as a source of strength that allowed them to realize their own potential. Sister Doris told me that,

The value they give to women here. Because the value that we have here is incalculable. Because there is often machismo, right? But we see here that the value of women is very indispensable, and that here God has women working and that the leader of this temple is a woman, where she is supported and where we feel loved, respected and that our opinion counts a lot. Most of the people here who serve God are women. Where God has given many of them a home, many who could not have children now have them. Many who were not working have been given [a job] by God. Many who did not have qualifications are now preparing, they are studying, there is no age because for God there is no age for you to do what you want. Then we see that here women are given privileges, privileges in a good sense of the word, right? Not that we reject men, no, but women feel privileged.¹⁸¹

And in the same direction Sister Clara said that the Church taught her how to value herself,

[The Church] has taught me to value myself, to know that one has a value... that one counts... It has taught me not to feel less, to never feel discriminated against... I have come to feel that

¹⁸¹ “Y el valor que dan aquí a la mujer. Porque el valor que hay aquí es incalculable. Porque muchas veces existe el machismo ¿no?, pero vemos aquí que el valor de la mujer es muy indispensable, y que aquí Dios tiene trabajando a la mujer y que la líder de este templo es una mujer, donde tiene el respaldo y donde aquí nos sentimos amadas, respetadas y que nuestra opinión cuenta mucho. Y que la mayoría de las personas aquí que le sirven a Dios son mujeres. Donde Dios a muchas les ha dado un hogar, a muchas que no podían tener hijos los tienen. Muchas que no estaban trabajando Dios les ha dado... Muchas que no tenían títulos de estudio ahora se están preparando, donde están estudiando, donde no hay edad porque para Dios no existe la edad para usted realizar lo que usted desea. Entonces vemos que aquí a la mujer se le da como privilegios, privilegios en un buen sentido de la palabra ¿no? No que rechazar a los hombres, no, pero las mujeres nos sentimos privilegiadas”

support of being able to say “yes, I am capable of running a home. Yes, I am capable of being wife, of being a mother. I am able to work. I am able to study”. And carry everything at the same time, not forgetting who I am... Now I know that all the challenges I undertake can be achieved. And with Him I can be a super-human, a super-woman.¹⁸²

For her part, Sister Beatriz recognized, in a particularly moving way, that being in this Church is what has given her value, and what has allowed her to recognize good characteristic in herself,

The Lord has begun to give me the value of a woman, right? Because even though I have children and that, as they say, is the most beautiful thing, the greatest thing that one can give is to give life, right? But I did not feel the courage that the Lord started to give me [here], to believe in myself. That one has qualities that the Lord brings to the forefront and one marvels that there were some good things inside oneself. And I feel very happy, and very joyful and very pleased.¹⁸³

All of these experiences and stories were spoken from an inner feeling of being people that matter and whose goals are accomplishable because God is with them; the same God who told them that women have the same value as men. In the words of Sister Adriana “The fact that I as a woman am important to God and that I have the same value and can do the same [as a man], obviously makes me feel empowered, and I think that it is something that God does with one's self-esteem, and that gives one the strength to not feel superior but equal”¹⁸⁴.

Therefore, being in the Church has enhanced these women's self-esteem, by giving them a positive sense of value that provides them with the strength to accomplish their goals. These assertions coincide with the observations made by Olga Lucía Rey Martínez during her fieldwork with Evangelical and Pentecostal women in Bogotá's poor neighbourhoods. According to Rey Martínez, being part of an Evangelical or Pentecostal community “promotes women self-esteem, encourages them to undertake new challenges and to overcome their conditions, in addition to transforming the imaginaries and

¹⁸² “[La Iglesia] me ha enseñado a valorarme, a saber que uno tiene un valor... que uno cuenta... Me ha enseñando a no sentirme menos, a no sentirme nunca discriminada... He llegado a sentir ese apoyo de poder decir “si soy capaz de llevar un hogar. si soy capaz de ser esposa, de ser madre. Si soy capaz de trabajar. Si soy capaz de estudiar.! Y llevar todo contemporáneamente, no olvidándome quien soy... Ahora se que todos los retos que pueda emprender puedo lograrlos. Y con Él yo puedo ser un super-humano, una super-mujer.”

¹⁸³ “el Señor ha comenzado a darme el valor de mujer ¿no? Porque a pesar de que yo tengo niños y de que, como dicen lo más bonito, lo más hermoso que uno puede dar es dar vida ¿no? Pero no sentía el valor que el Señor le empieza a dar, a reconocer a uno. Que uno tiene cualidades que el Señor va sacando y uno va maravillándose que había algunas cosas buenas en uno. Y yo me siento muy feliz, y muy dichosa y muy contenta. Y le agradezco tanto al Señor por haber permitido conocerlo”

¹⁸⁴ “El hecho de que sea yo como mujer importante para Dios y que tenga el mismo valor y que pueda hacer lo mismo, por supuesto que me da un empoderamiento, y pienso que algo que Dios hace con la autoestima de uno, y que le da esa fuerza, no para sentirse superior, como digo, sino en igualdad de condiciones”

representations that do not allow [women's] self-development"¹⁸⁵ (cited by Beltrán 2013, 185).

It is not only a personal change, it also involves their families, and in particular their husbands. Of the women I interviewed, two of them were married before converting to the CGMJCI and now both them and their husbands are part of the Church. Both Sister Doris and Sister Miriam recounted that their husbands and their interpersonal relationships had changed for the better,

I saw the changes in him because he began to respect me more as a woman. He stopped drinking. He stopped being short-tempered as he did not accept any advice from anyone, no! He would not accept someone telling him "this is wrong; this is right." And that's where I saw it. Respect. Respect for me was the most important thing that I started to see in him. As for me, I changed the arrogance. I thought that showing that I was strong made me better, and I never told my family how much I loved them, how much I respected them, and today I can say it. Because before my pride would not let me do it, now I tell my sisters, my brother, my mom how much I love her¹⁸⁶ (Sister Doris)

The Lord changed my husband and my daughter. Now we are here and we are very happy. My husband used to be very rude and the Lord has changed him, as He told me that it would be a home as I wanted it, because I had spent 20 years with him and I was unhappy. For the last 11 years I've been a happy woman, a woman full of love every day for my husband, and I know it is like this for him also because in the moments when I am sick, I see how much he cares for me. Also in my family, we are very close. My home is a harmonious place. In my home there are never any arguments but there is always dialogue.

When I arrived at the Church I arrived with a wrecked home. When the Lord told me that He was going to change my man for me, it was very difficult, and I said "but Lord, who is capable of changing him? No one". And now I see him changed. God is the only one that has changed my husband. He has given me a very nice husband. There are times when my husband has difficult moments and I am there to support him, or, if I should undergo some critical moments he'll be there also to support me¹⁸⁷. (Sister Miriam)

¹⁸⁵ "promueve la autoconfianza, el ánimo para emprender nuevos retos y superarse, además de transformar los imaginarios y representaciones que no les permiten [a las mujeres] desarrollarse a sí mismas"

¹⁸⁶ "vi el cambio de él es porque empezó a respetarme más como mujer, dejó de tomar, dejó de ser un poco malgeniado, porque lo era y no aceptaba que uno le diera un consejo, ¡no!, que uno le dijera "esto esta mal, esto esta bien". Y ahí fue donde yo vi. Y el respeto, el respeto para mi fue lo más importante que empecé a ver en él. En cuanto a mi, me cambio la soberbia. Yo pensé que con demostrar que yo era fuerte, eso me hacía más, y nunca le había dicho a mi familia cuanto la amaba, cuanto la respetaba, y hoy en día lo puedo decir. Porque antes mi orgullo no me dejaba hacerlo, ahora le digo a mis hermanas, a mi hermano, a mi mamá cuanto la quiero"

¹⁸⁷ "el Señor fue cambiando a mi esposo y a mi hija. Ahora estamos aquí y somos muy felices. Mi esposo antes era muy rudo y el Señor me lo ha cambiado como me dijo, que sería un hogar como yo lo quería, porque yo tenía 20 años de estar con él y no era feliz. Hace 11 años soy una mujer feliz, una mujer llena de amor cada día para mi esposo, y yo se que también para él porque en los momentos en los que estoy enferma, veo como él se preocupa mucho por mi. Igualmente mi familia, somos muy unidos. Mi hogar es un lugar lleno de armonía. En

Sister Miriam's husband, Brother Hernando, recognizes that he has changed since coming to the Church, and that he is less short-tempered as well as more patient and understanding with his wife.

According to Brusco, Evangelical conversion in Colombia helps women overcome *machismo*, which she considers a "useful concept in describing an aspect of sex-gender systems characterized by the alienation of men from the household (including the attenuation of their roles as husbands and fathers) and their identification with the world outside rather than with their household group" (1995, 79-80). In a *machista* society men belong to the public sphere and women to the private one, which is described perfectly by the old Colombian saying "*las mujeres son de su casa y los hombres de la calle*" [women's place is in the home and men's is in the street]. But this separation – which is also generally present in other patriarchal societies– is accompanied by a male role identified with aggressiveness, self-indulgence and lack of responsibility for the house and family, which allows men to spend their money on themselves rather than on satisfying their families' needs. Furthermore, it condones the existence of other relationships or even families outside the marriage¹⁸⁸ (Brusco 1995).

This creates striking differences between women's interests, which are predominantly aligned with satisfying the home's needs, particularly that of their children; and men's interests which are completely alien to the household environment. Behavioural codes inside Evangelical and Pentecostal communities "forbid much of the behavior associated with the machismo complex: men can no longer drink, smoke, or have women outside the marriage" (Brusco 1995, 125). These communities also privilege obedience, consensus and the lack of conflict. Hence, Brusco concludes: "with conversion machismo is replaced by Evangelical belief as the main determinant of husband-wife relations. The machismo role and the male role defined by Evangelicalism are almost diametrical opposites. Aggression, violence, pride, self-indulgence, and an individualistic orientation in the public sphere are replaced by peace seeking, humility,

mi hogar no hay discusiones para nada, siempre hay como un dialogo, como una comprensión, como que estamos cada uno pensado en lo mismo.

Cuando yo llegué a la Iglesia llegué con mi hogar totalmente destruido. Cuando el Señor me decía que iba a cambiar mi varón para mi era muy difícil y yo decía "pero Señor, ¿a ese quien lo cambia? Nadie". Y ahora verlo cambiado y solamente Dios el único que me ha cambiado a mi esposo. Me ha dado un esposo muy lindo. Hay momentos que mi esposo pasa momentos difíciles y estoy yo ahí para apoyarlo. O yo paso momentos y él está ahí también para sustentarme"

¹⁸⁸ Both in the past and nowadays, in Colombia, depending on the generation, the class and the region, it was normal –if not expected– for men to have more than one woman, the official one, that is, his wife, and other(s) on the side, with whom he even occasionally had children.

self-restrain, and a collective orientation and identity with the church and the home” (1995, 137).

For this reason, Brusco sees in women’s Evangelic conversion and practice a strategic form of female collective action, which allows women to challenge prevailing forms of female subordination. Firstly, as men are no longer aggressive, and no longer smoke or drink, or have other women, it alters sex role behaviours and “such things as the husband’s responsibility to his wife and children, marital fidelity, and the mother’s role in the raising of her children” acquire predominance (1995, 125). Secondly, it promotes female interests and shifts “male consumption patterns to female ones”, where the “money that would otherwise have been spent on ‘vices’ by men in the public realm is reoriented back into the household budget” (124-125). Lastly, it raises the status of women, because their interests coincide with those of the Church, and they are valued as important members of the congregation.

My own fieldwork confirms Brusco’s assessment that husbands’ and wives’ relations improve with Evangelical conversion, at least in the Colombian context. My interviews and discussion groups also allowed me to identify a peculiarity that relates to the raising of women’s status with Pentecostalism, particularly in the CGMJCI.

According to what I was told during my fieldwork, in order to serve God and receive His blessing one must not only believe in Him but also listen closely to what He has to say, and obey Him willingly, selflessly and joyfully. One of the last sermons I attended was on the importance of obedience. According to the preacher, in order for God to change one’s life and to see the prophecies fulfilled, one has to obey Him. Hearing God is not just a physical thing, it requires actually heeding His commands, letting one’s pride aside.

In order to do so, traits like abnegation, self-denial and humility, all of which had traditionally been assigned to women, mainly in a negative sense, acquire a new positive meaning. Having and exercising those characteristics is what allows a person to receive the gifts from God and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, Brother Marco and Brother Hernando recognized that women are more willing to serve God and that they should emulate them,

In the Church now, in these last years in which it has grown so much, 80% and 90% are women. So, women are now more valuable. Wherever you go the percentage of women is particularly high. It is something incredible, they have such a noble heart, different from a man’s. We are harder, more rebellious. Until we see, until He tilts us, and we do not see His hand ... But the

woman does not need to see, and her heart is for that, she is more sensitive. That's why the church worldwide is full of women wherever you go.¹⁸⁹ (Brother Marco)

...we can all do it [serve God], but it is like a lack of putting more effort. A lack, more than anything from us men, to do the effort. But I believe that we are all equal and we are all capable of doing what a woman does.¹⁹⁰ (Brother Hernando)

The women I interviewed confirmed this. Sister Doris claimed,

In the things of the Lord, spiritually, I believe that women have been given a very special place, and it is the Lord who has done it, because we see respect, we see courage, we see how a woman runs our Church and how she is loved, valued, and that we are an example for many women who still do not know the Church, but they see in us, I can say it, they see many virtues, that maybe we did not even think we had and today we have them and we see them. For me being a woman is being a fighter, it's courage, it's love.¹⁹¹

Consequently, at least inside the Church, women have found a powerful source of self-determination and empowerment, which reflects in their families and in their relations with others, because they have more confidence and self-esteem. Sister Adriana expressed it like this, “the Church has served me not only spiritually but also in my life, in every other aspect of my life”¹⁹².

Furthermore, in 2000 the Church founded the Political Party MIRA, *Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta*, where women have always had preponderant roles. According to Piraquive,

MIRA's ultimate goal is to inspire and spread good behaviour and honesty in the people of Colombia and the nations, with its way of thinking, speaking and acting, through its representatives. They must be honest, organized, responsible persons, who always look at people's interests without pursuing their personal benefits: profit, enrichment or ambition. This

¹⁸⁹ “En la iglesia ahora, a nivel de estos años, que ha crecido tanto la iglesia, el 80% y el 90% esta es la mujer. O sea que es más valiosa ahora como mujer. Donde usted vaya el porcentaje de mujeres demasiado. Es que es algo increíble, tiene ese corazón tan noble, diferente al hombre. Nosotros somos más duros, más rebeldes. Nosotros hasta que no veamos, hasta que no nos incline y no veamos la mano... Pero la mujer no necesita de ver, ella cree y su corazón es para eso, es más sensible. Por eso la iglesia a nivel mundial es llena de mujeres adonde vaya.”

¹⁹⁰ “Todos podemos hacerlo [servir a Dios], sino que es falta de como poner más empeño. Como falta, mas que nada de parte de nosotros los hombres, de poner empeño. Pero yo creo que todos somos iguales y todos somos capaces de hacer lo mismo que hace una mujer”

¹⁹¹ “En las cosas del Señor, espiritualmente, creo que a las mujeres nos han dado un lugar muy especial, y donde el Señor lo ha hecho, porque vemos el respeto, vemos el valor, vemos como una mujer dirige nuestra iglesia y como es amada, valorada, y que somos ejemplo para muchas que de todas formas aún no conocen la iglesia, pero ven en nosotras, yo lo puedo decir, ven muchas virtudes, que de pronto ni nosotras mismas pensábamos que las teníamos, y hoy en día las tenemos y las vemos. Y para mi ser mujer es lucha, es valentía, es amor”

¹⁹² “la iglesia me ha servido no solo espiritualmente sino como tal en mi vida y todos los otros aspectos”.

*is what God reproves: that a person wants to participate in a government or in politics, only for their particular benefit.*¹⁹³ (2017, 145)

The party was co-founded by Alexandra Moreno Piraquive, Piraquive's oldest daughter and Carlos Alberto Baena López, the main preacher of CGMJCI after Piraquive. Originally Alexandra Moreno Piraquive was its president, and she won a seat in the Senate for three consecutive terms (2002-2014). In 2014 Moreno Piraquive left the Party. The official statement was that she had decided not to present herself for the congressional election for the 2014-2018 term for "personal and family reasons"¹⁹⁴.

MIRA is the only political party in Colombia that has the zipper system to set up their electoral lists, which guarantees equal participation between men and women. Some of their most prominent members are women, i.e., Gloria Stella Diaz, who has served as a member of the House of Representative for Bogotá for two consecutive terms, as a council member in Bogotá and as a Senator.

The Party has focused its efforts on presenting or supporting bills in favour of women, children and the elderly (Beltrán 2013), such as the bill that condemns the acid attacks on women or of the law that typifies femicide as a crime¹⁹⁵. The Party also defends women in special conditions of oppression, like community mothers¹⁹⁶. According to Beltrán and Jesús David Quiroga (2017), due to the fact that a great part of the Church's parishioners are women, it is not coincidental that the party representatives, who also are predominantly women, promote this kind of bills.

This scenario might lead one to think that the CGMJCI creates the right environment for a collective positive empowerment, one that increases the amount of power available to all without taking rights away from someone else. The problem, as I

¹⁹³ "MIRA tiene como fin último inspirar y sembrar el buen comportamiento y la honestidad en las gentes de Colombia y de las naciones, con su manera de pensar, de hablar y de actuar, por medio de sus representantes. Ellos deben ser personas honestas, organizadas, responsables, que miren siempre los intereses de la gente sin perseguir sus beneficios personales: Lucro, enriquecimiento o ambición. Esto es lo que Dios reprueba: Que una persona quiera participar en un gobierno o en la política, sólo para su beneficio particular".

¹⁹⁴ MIRA. CDN Cadena de Noticias. "No buscará la reelección la senadora de MIRA, Alexandra Moreno Piraquive". November 15, 2013 <https://partidomira.com/no-buscara-la-reeleccion-la-senadora-de-mira-alexandra-moreno-piraquive/> Last accessed September 9, 2018.

¹⁹⁵ MIRA "MIRA pide Unidad Especializada de la Fiscalía para atender víctimas de ataques con ácido y feminicidio" August 4, 2016 <https://partidomira.com/mira-pide-unidad-especializada-la-fiscalia-atender-victimas-ataques-acido-feminicidio/> Last accessed September 9, 2018.

MIRA. "MIRA solicita al Gobierno Nacional decretar alerta naranja por feminicidios en el país" June 3, 2017 <https://partidomira.com/mira-solicita-al-gobierno-nacional-decretar-alerta-naranja-feminicidios-pais/> Last accessed September 9, 2018.

¹⁹⁶Community mothers are women that the State put in charge of taking care of children in poor and marginalized neighbourhoods and zones all around Colombia, without paying them or recognizing their activities as a job. Defensa de las madres comunitarias por parte de Irma Luz Herrera, representante por el MIRA a la Cámara de Representantes por Bogotá <https://www.facebook.com/IrmaLuzHerrera/videos/1875434459214588/> Last accessed September 10, 2018.

will show, is that this empowerment does not extend to other oppressed groups and that although women gain in self-esteem and confidence, gender-sex roles and stereotypes are not only present but reinforced.

4.3. Limits and blind spots: keeping gender stereotypes and oppressions

Although Pentecostalism, as seen by the example of the CGMJCI, can create spaces for the empowerment of women, giving them roles of authority and instruments that help them enhance their confidence and self-esteem, which in turn improves their capacity for self-determination, it also maintains and reinforces gender roles.

The first critique that one can do is that, even if the CGMJCI states that men and women can equality fulfil the different authoritative positions available in the denomination, the reality is that men, including the current president of the Political Party, hold the most important roles after Piraquive. In addition, most preachers are still men. Zion International Magazine, one of the official publications of the CGMJCI, reported earlier this year that a woman is in charge of the church in Wellington, Australia¹⁹⁷, but that is the only official document I could find about female preachers in the Church apart from Piraquive herself. Thus, if one considers that by 2013, as reported by Beltrán, the CGMJCI had 372 temples in Colombia and 102 in other parts of the world, then the one female preacher reported does not even represent 1% of all the preachers. The new doctrine is there, the practice is not.

Moreover, the fieldwork allowed me to experience first-hand the roles that the CGMJCI considers proper for men and women. The idea that men and women complement each other perfectly was repetitive during the sermons and the interviews. The positive side of this statement is that in a relationship men and women sustain each other, as sister Clara put it, “where I can’t he can, and where he can’t I can, we support each other”¹⁹⁸. However, this has also a negative side. Firstly, although they claim that men and women are equal in marriage, they also maintain the idea of man as the head of the household¹⁹⁹. This is problematic because it implies a hierarchy between husband and

¹⁹⁷ Zion International Magazine. “A scientist becomes a preacher: Meet the woman in charge of the church in Wellington, New Zealand”. March 2018.

¹⁹⁸ “donde yo no puedo, él puede, donde él no puede, yo puedo, y nos apoyamos”

¹⁹⁹ “En el matrimonio lo lindo que Dios hace es que ha puesto esa igualdad. Que al hombre lo ha puesto como cabeza de familia, porque te hace recordar y te hace ver de que esa cabeza es Dios. No significa que tu estés abajo y que no cuentes. No, hoy Dios nos ha dado valor. Porque si antes en la Biblia o en la sociedad no se le

wife, in which he rules as head and she submits. Ideally, the woman submits willingly, but this keeps her in a practical and symbolic secondary position.

Secondly, by presenting man and woman as complementary, the CGMJCI excludes other kinds of relations apart from the heterosexual one. In her autobiography, Piraquive (2017) refers to homosexuality and lesbianism as a sin. She actually recalls an episode in which a preacher was expelled from the Church after preaching that God authorized homosexuality and lesbianism. Because she and the Church have faced legal charges for discriminating against members of the LGBTQ+ community, Piraquive affirms that “the Church knows not to ask anybody about his or her private life or his or her sexual tendency”²⁰⁰ (2017, 163), and declares that it is God who has changed the deviant tendencies of gays and lesbians that have joined the Church,

I remember the case of a young woman who told the Church that she was a lesbian and remained like that in the Church for a few years, until at a certain moment that tendency was lost without her having to do anything extraordinary, and that later in prophecy the Holy Spirit told her that He was going to give her a husband and she actually married a man who filled her life with happiness. This is how the Church's works, it is God who does the work, not me, not threats or human imposition.²⁰¹

This approach to the LGBTQ+ community is dangerous, negative and disheartening for several reasons. It is dangerous for LGBTQ+ individuals that belong to the Church because they are being forced, if not by threats by peer pressure and authoritarian calls, to resignedly hide their true self and accept heterosexual relationships, to the detriment of their emotional and psychological health. It is negative for society at large, because members of the CGMJCI have political power, either as constituents when casting their votes or as representatives of the people as members of the Political Party which holds public office. In fact, MIRA's official statutes declare in article 6, “The family: the principle of society. MIRA protects the family as the fundamental cell of society; understands, moreover, marriage as the link between a man and a woman”²⁰².

daba ese rol a la mujer, no llevándolo a libertinaje de perder propio esa parte de mujer, sino no manteniéndola. Manteniendo a la par tus ideas, compartiendo, apoyándose” (Hermana Clara).

²⁰⁰ “la Iglesia saber que a nadie se le pregunta por su vida privada o por sus tendencias sexuales”

²⁰¹ “Recuerdo el caso de una joven que le dijo a la Iglesia que ella estaba en el lesbianismo y así permaneció en la Iglesia durante unos años, hasta que de un momento a otro se le fue perdiendo esa tendencia sin ella tener que hacer nada extraordinario, y que después en profecía el Espíritu Santo le dijo que le iba a dar un esposo y ella efectivamente se había casado con un hombre que le había llenado de felicidad la vida. Así es como se trabaja en la Iglesia, es Dios quien trabaja, no yo, no las amenazas, ni la imposición humana”

²⁰² The original is in Spanish. “La familia: principio de la sociedad. El Partido Político MIRA protege como célula fundamental de la sociedad a la familia; entiende, además, el matrimonio como el vínculo entre un hombre y una mujer.” This and any other translation of this material, unless stated otherwise, is mine.

Therefore, they symbolize an actual threat to the rights that the LGBTQ+ community has fought so hard to obtain.

But the CGMJCI does not only champion heterosexual relations and the role of the wife, it also sees motherhood as an essential part of being a woman. During the discussion group, when I asked them to explain how they would define women, both men and women referred to woman being “the vessel of life” and “the one that gives life”. During the individual interview, the possibility of being a mother or actually being one was a prevalent characteristic. Both Sister Doris and Sister Clara referred to the fact that the Church has given women the courage to become mothers, and sister Beatriz said that the most beautiful thing that a woman can do is to give life.

While there is nothing wrong with valuing motherhood, putting it as the pinnacle of a woman’s life is problematic. Firstly, it relegates women that cannot be or do not want to be mothers to a secondary position, because they are not fulfilling their social purpose. Secondly, it affects negatively the exercise of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, because practices like abortion are seen as a sin. During the discussion group, their position was that giving life was women’s gift and that aborting was a murder and a way of denying that gift,

One cannot interrupt [a pregnancy] because it is a life, because it is something that the Lord has allowed, right? So my idea is that no, it is something that the Lord has allowed and if He has allowed it, it is because something more important will come from that creature, it can be a creation for the things of the Lord.²⁰³ (Sister Miriam)

I believe that if the Lord formed us and gave us a womb and we were born to achieve our potential as women, as wives, as mothers, for me it is essential to give life. Because for me to give life is a blessing. And it's the most beautiful thing a woman can experience.²⁰⁴ (Sister Doris)

It is a gift to be a mother. And to think that it can be interrupted voluntarily by mistakes, because if it is interrupted it is for that reason... they are beings already, from the moment they are formed there is life. And to decide for the life of a being is like saying "I am killing", only that it is not seen that way.²⁰⁵ (Sister Clara)

²⁰³ “uno no puede interrumpir [un embarazo] porque es una vida, porque es algo que el Señor lo ha permitido ¿no? Entonces mi idea es que no, es algo que el Señor lo ha permitido y si Él lo ha permitido es porque de esa creatura vendrá algo más importante, puede ser una creación más para las cosas del Señor.”

²⁰⁴ “Yo creo que si el Señor nos formó y nos dio una matriz y nacimos para realizarnos como mujeres, como esposas, como madres, para mi es esencial dar vida. Porque para mi dar vida es bendición. Y es lo más lindo que una mujer puede experimentar.”

²⁰⁵ “Es un don el ser madre. Y pensar que se pueda interrumpir voluntariamente por errores, porque si se interrumpe es por ese motivo... son seres que ya están, desde el momento en que se formó es una vida. Y decidir por la vida de un ser es como decir “yo estoy matando”, solo que no se ve así”.

In this view, given that what matters to them is the “new life” that is forming, once a woman gets pregnant she loses every right to self-determination and bodily autonomy. In a country like Colombia, where abortion is legal only in three instances and only because the Constitutional Court declared it was unconstitutional to criminalize abortion in every case²⁰⁶, a position like this jeopardizes the chances women have to decide about their own body.

Hence, although Pentecostalism in general and the CGMJCI in particular can give women some instruments for their empowerment, they also maintain several gender stereotypes, particularly when it comes to the sexual and reproductive aspects of life, that reinforce the patriarchal society and keep the members of traditionally oppressed groups in a secondary and degraded position. Consequently, and unfortunately, it is not possible to affirm that Pentecostal practices as studied in this dissertation are completely compatible with feminism.

²⁰⁶ The instances are: pregnancy product of rape, danger for the life or health of the mother and unfeasibility of the fetus. See Sentencia C-355 de 2006. M.P. Jaime Araújo Rentería y Clara Inés Vargas Hernández.

Final Reflexions

Throughout the genealogy that I attempted to create in this dissertation there is one principle that stands in all of the analysed cases. That principle is the idea that men and women are equal because they are both God's creatures and, as such they are endowed with the same duties and the same rights.

In Mary Astell's *Proposal* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* this equality principle takes the form of properly articulated demands for equal education for women, because that is the only way women can properly develop their God-given reason. Their projects diverge in several aspects, but the core of the matter is the same, to present society with a practical program for social change. This journey takes both authors to deeply analyse the gender system that oppressed them and their fellow women; concluding that women's degraded position in society is not due to any natural or Godly order, but on customs, morals and ill-interpretations of the Scriptures.

The trail left by Astell and Wollstonecraft is then followed both by Radical Unitarian women and by Quaker women, in the first organized women's rights movements of the nineteenth century. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, accompanied by several Quaker and religious women, called for the first Woman's Right Convention in the United States. Quaker women already preached and practiced the principle of equality, because the core of their belief system is precisely that the Light within can manifest in everyone, thus women and men were potentially equal recipients of God's revelation. This equality under God was captured in the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, where, using the American Declaration of Independence as a model, women declared that men and women are equals because it was intended to be so by the Creator of all things, consequently they all had been endowed with unalienable rights like life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Based on the works of Wollstonecraft and Sarah Grimké these women defied the customs and laws of their time, making an articulate case against Blackstone and the figure of coverture, under which married women lost their legal personality.

When the fight for women's rights was already on its way, Pentecostalism, as a result of revivalism and the holiness movement, irrupted into the religious American life. This faith also preaches equality between men and women, at least when it comes to receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts from the Lord. In the first years of this new denomination, pioneers like Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter and Aimee

Simple McPherson stand as examples of women who preached, established their own churches and used the Bible to justify their authority. Although not as strongly as the previous women studied in this genealogy, Woodworth-Etter and McPherson contributed to the empowerment of women, preaching their equality and their ability to minister in the same way as men.

Pentecostalism, as part of the Evangelical tradition, extended throughout Latin America, and when it arrived in Colombia, a confessional Catholic country, it became, together with other protestant denominations, a form of peaceful resistance against the State. As studies before mine and my own fieldwork experience show, although Pentecostalism is in several aspects a conservative faith, it has actually given Colombian women tools and instruments to heighten their self-esteem, to change certain gender role behaviours in their partners, to champion their own interests and to improve their personal and public life.

However, these cases I analysed do not come without contradictions or elements that act against women's self-determination. Because of the context in which they were written, both Astell's *Proposal* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* championed women's roles as wives and mothers, which today, if taken at face value and without a proper analysis and contextualization, seem particularly problematic and restrictive.

Women's demands on the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments include all aspects of social life, demanding equal standing for men and women in education, work and responsibilities. Again, considering its context, it does not problematize the male-female dichotomy, and takes as model for its demands the lives of middle-class white women.

Pentecostalism is probably the most problematic of all, because although it gives some instruments for women to improve their conditions, it also maintains particularly restrictive gender stereotypes that go against women's complete self-determination and the rights of other oppressed groups, particularly the LGBTI+ community.

Nevertheless, by studying them and knowing their discourses, it is possible to create our own strategies and build bridges between feminism and religion, because, paraphrasing Lisa Stephenson (2012), it is necessary for religious women and feminists to stop talking about each other and start talking to one another, in order to bring to the table their different experiences, knowledge and strategies to build together the better world that both feminisms and religions hope for.

This equality principle, that is, that as God's creatures we are all entitled to the same rights and are meant to fulfil the same duties, combined with the prophetic-liberating principle proposed by Ruether (1983), according to which the Christian message has to be understood as an instrument to end all oppressions, may be an appropriate point of departure to start new dialogues and build new bridges together.

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