

Kari Elisabeth Børresen (1932 - 2016)

I knew Kari Elisabeth Børresen on occasion of an international conference about Vittoria Colonna held in 1986 in Naples and then she immediately showed the independent and provocative aspects of her character.

Given an academic, rigid and oft hypocrite world Kari Børresen didn't hesitate to break the schemes and to express herself freely, both towards the historical source she interpreted, and towards the people in front of her: academics, academic or ecclesiastic authority. In her I see what the ancient Greeks called *parrhesia*: clearly talking, freely, challenging the power and interpreting the tradition with new categories.

The history and its dynamics are at the centre of Kari Børresen's reflection, who was never indifferent to the sources she read; on the contrary, she had a logical and passionate dialog with the text: she interrogated and judged it. The past had to give answers because of the urgency of the today's questions. The Fathers of the Church, the theologian and the women didn't escape its judgment. The anthropological thought of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas was examined with meticulous analysis and it led Kari to consider how all the religious constrictions had to be historically situated and need complex processes of enculturation (cfr. *Subordination et Equivalence. Nature et rôle de la femme d'après Augustin et Thomas d'Aquino*, Oslo-Paris 1968, translated in more languages and riedeted with the title *Subordination and Equivalence. A Reprint of a Pioneering Classic*, Kampen 1995). At the same time the necessity of giving visibility and strength to the women's words was born in her (*Madri della Chiesa*, Naples 1993) highlighting the presence of a matristic thought that keeps up with that of the Fathers (*From Patristics to Matristics*, Rome 2002).



Starting from the religious cultures' androcentric texts, Kari asked herself questions about the repercussions the religions, set up in patriarchal contexts, had for the juridical system elaboration. For her the *genre* questions were not only about the feminine identity but rather about the entire dimension of the religious phenomenon: the anthropologic vision, the self-understanding of Church and community, the theological system, the God's figure. The principle of equality and universality in the right, the problem of the active inclusion of women for Kari had to deeply ask the religions and change the traditional forms of the ecumenical comparison too (ed., *Christian and Islamic Gender Models*, Rome, 2004). Indeed, living in a common earth doesn't need only a dialog between different cultures and traditions, but it rather requires a called into question of the structural parameter of each religions and of the anthropological-cultural paradigm on which it's based. (Kari Elisabeth and Sara Cabibbo (eds.) *Religion, Gender, Human Rights in Europe*, Rome, 2006).

Kari was Norwegian, but she studied in America and in France, chose as her second homeland Italy, full of conflicts, but also, as she used to say, so full of life and cultural debate. She didn't hesitate to expose herself, to leave in order to achieve a mission that could go beyond her individuality and to open herself to the future generations: to give birth to daughters and sons far from the «androcentric claustrophobia» of our West. It was a real "Matriarch" and I feel myself somewhat a Kari's daughter and for this reason I have to thank her: for the courage she had to break the schemes and the stereotypes and for that creative ability she used in the reinterpretation of the past, in the coining of new terms (let's think about *matristic* or *androcentrism*) and in the catching *the new that is moving forwards*, that today we theologians often have fear to recognize.

Her most important publications:

- *Subordination et Equivalence. Nature et rôle de la femmed'après Augustin et Thomas d'Aquin*, Oslo/Paris 1968. Reprint: *Subordination and Equivalence. A Reprint of a Pioneering Classic*, Kampen: KokPharos Press, 1995.
- *Madri della Chiesa*, Napoli: D'Auria, 1993
- Børresen Kari Elisabeth and Kari Vogt (eds.), *Women's Studies of the Christian and Islamic Traditions. Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance Foremothers*, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 1993.
- (ed.), *The Image of God. Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Børresen Kari Elisabeth, Sara Cabibbo, Edith Specht (eds.), *Gender and Religion/Genre e religione. European studies/Études européennes*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 2001.
- Børresen Kari Elisabeth, Øyvind Norderval, Katrine Lund Ore (eds.), *From patristics to matristics: Selected Articles on Christian Gender Models by Kari Elisabeth Børresen*, Roma: Herder, 2002.
- Børresen Kari Elisabeth (ed.), *Christian and Islamic Gender Models*, Roma: Herder, 2004.
- Børresen Kari Elisabeth and Sara Cabibbo (eds.), *Religion, Gender, Human Rights in Europe*, Roma: Herder, 2006.
- Adriana Valerio and Kari Elisabeth Børresen (eds.), *Donne e Bibbia nel Medioevo (secoli XII-XV)*, La Bibbia e le donne 6.2, Trapani: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe 2011 (ed. in Span. 2012, German 2013, English 2015).
- Kari E. Børresen and Emanuela Prinziavalli (eds.), *La donna nello sguardo degli antichi autori cristiani*, La Bibbia e le donne 5.1, Trapani: Il Pozzo di Giacobbe 2012 (ed. Span. 2014, German 2016).

Adriana Valerio