



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

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Chancellor's Update

The selection for this year's Day of Recollection and reflection was based on the wide background of its author and its relevance to recent political/cultural events in the United States.

After World War II had commenced in Poland, Wanda Poltawska was eventually arrested by the Nazi authorities, interrogated, beaten, and then sent to the infamous concentration camp at Ravensbruck. Ill-fed, cold and working under brutal conditions, only 1 in 5 of the Polish women prisoners survived. Wanda among others was forced into a program of surgical experiments to develop drugs for treating soldiers' wounds. After surviving these horrific conditions, and eventually liberated in 1945, she went to Krakow, studied to be a medical doctor and psychiatrist, then married and started a family.

Yet the events of Ravensbruck continued to haunt her as she continued to ask herself, "Who is man?" that such inhumane conditions could occur. She knew that she needed to find a confessor, a spiritual advisor, to help resolve this issue. That priest was Father Karol Wojtyla, who later became Pope John Paul II.

Some years later, when Wanda was diagnosed with cancer, her family wrote to Bishop Wojtyla, who was then in Rome, and asked if he could pray for a miracle to keep Wanda with her family. Bishop Wojtyla wrote to Padre Pio, and requested his intercession. The miracle occurred and Wanda lived.

Much of Mrs. Poltawska's writings were influenced by that question, "Who is man?" She collaborated with Bishop Wojtyla on his book Love and Responsibility, and provided some of the research for Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

Wanda Poltawska's essay "The Responsibility of Woman for the Fate of the World", the topic for the 2012 Day of Recollection, speaks in sharp contrast to a contemporary assertion that women's lives revolve around contraception and speaks to women of all ages and all generations. Read, study and meditate on this, then please pass this on to others.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF WOMAN FOR THE FATE OF THE WORLD Dr. Wanda Poltawska

Introduction

The theme thus formulated seems pompous, perhaps exaggerated, and yet it contains the truth.

Woman has a great role to fulfill in the history of the world. She has always had it and always will. This role is timeless and valid for all times and places. Woman has a role to fulfill in the history of mankind and in the history of salvation.

Today this problem is especially relevant because of the present tensions and controversies. Feminist movements demanding the "liberation of woman" and her full appreciation do not in reality serve this aim; they disclose a lack of deeper reflection upon the heart of the matter. It may therefore be useful to try to contemplate some aspects of the problem perhaps not always noticeable.

1. Womanhood as a gift and as a task

Everyone receives, without his or her own merit, the gift of existence, and of life and of course of sexuality and body, since life on earth is biologically conditioned. However, not everyone, and especially not all women are conscious that this gift, given by the Creator Himself, although transmitted by means of the parents' cooperation, is at the same time a task.

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Everyone receives the gift of life together with the task of living it on earth in such a way that it would become a straight way of return to the Creator, simply a way to heaven. Human life has really no other sense.

That means that woman should live her life as a woman and as a woman obtain salvation. Faced with this gift, woman must first receive her womanhood, fully accept it and realize it.

The belonging to a given sex is realized early in childhood. A small child soon learns that it is a girl like Mommy or a boy like Daddy. This knowledge is not always accompanied by a deeper consciousness that the given sex is precisely God's plan for me, that simply God Himself has thus decided. Even religious people seem sometimes to forget the divine origin of every human being. This divine origin makes all human persons equal: Both men and women are equal in their rights and duties of the children of God.

The consciousness of divine origin must influence the way of life. If all people were truly convinced of this fact, how differently they would treat each other!

A human person, created in the image of God - what a dimension of humanity! This dimension should decide about all human activity.

The Book of Genesis says in a most eloquent and incisive expression: "Man and Woman He created them." The first conclusion of this statement is that God willed both His children, both human persons, to be nevertheless different.

Heterosexuality of mankind is therefore an intended plan of God, who in His omnipotence and liberty could have created the world of man differently, but created it precisely in this way. This dissimilarity intended by God does not at present please many persons, and there are tendencies to level mankind. It is difficult to guess why all people should become similar and why their dissimilarity should be an irritant.

It is not truly easy to understand why modern Eve tries to imitate Adam. The causes of this fact are complex, but it seems, most of all, that the modern woman lacks the realization that she carries out God's plan by her womanhood.

What is this Eve like?

To return to Genesis, the scene of Eve's creation / however symbolically we consider it / shows just one thing: Eve was created for Adam, to be with him, and Adam, receiving Eve as a gift, expresses his enchantment.

God blessed womanhood with beauty. How often one has the chance to admire the beauty of some Eve. In a certain sense one might even say that Eve is not only the work of God, but His masterpiece, the last movement of the Master's chisel, with which He finished the work of Creation.

The Book of Genesis describes the following sequence of Creation: things, plants, animals, Adam and in the end, as the summit of creation, its climax - Eve, Mother of the Living.

From the Beginning the role and responsibility of Eve is foreshadowed. This beautiful creature of God, created "in relation to" Adam, stands before him - and what happens?

2. Eve with regard to Adam

It is possible to find more in this scene of the Book of Genesis, than only that Adam was enchanted with Eve, and that then he turned out to be weak and submissive to her ideas. It is significant, that the serpent - the symbol of Satan - did not try to induce Adam to sin, as if he knew that Adam would be immune to his proposals. Adam, man of God, was obedient to God and resistant to the influence of Satan; however, this same Adam, who did not yield to Satan, yields to Eve. Adam tries to justify

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himself, when God calls him, by accusing Eve, as if it were quite understandable, that if it was she who advised him, he could not refuse.

It was indeed the influence of Eve, the destructive role of woman, who was not able to resist Satan, but knew how to influence Adam. This goes on through the ages: all Eves know how to influence Adam. How often, in the negative way, in which the first Eve tempted Adam, some modern Adam leaves his wife and children, pursuing some Eve, who enchanted his eyes. How many wrongs in the history of mankind! Beauty, the good looks of a woman, this gift of God becomes the cause of deviation from God's plan.

The weakness of Adam towards Eve does not need any proof, since the history of mankind shows it clearly. The beauty of Eve awakens in Adam the desire to possess her and here begins the tragedy. Eve, desired by Adam, loses the greatness God has given her and agrees too often to become an object, taken and usurped.

The human person, treated as a thing, loses her original dimension and does not achieve the perfection that the Creator designed for her. The modern Eve first agrees to become a thing, a doll for Adam to play with, and then, in revolt against such a state, she wants to be equal to Adam to be quite like him. Eve, not understanding her different identity, loses herself in trying to become "somebody".

Jesus Christ warns men against such a treatment of women. He calls their attention to the danger that menaces men from the ensnaring beauty of woman. The look of admiration changes so easily into a look of lust. Jesus states this precisely when he says: "Whoever looks lustfully at a woman, has already committed adultery in his heart." Many Eves of this kind wander about the world of today. Eve not only accepts this state of affairs, but provokes it herself. Not knowing how to understand herself and find her own identity, she thinks that she gains acceptance in these looks of lust, and tries to do everything possible to awaken this lust. The whole modern industry, of pornography serves this one aim: to awaken desire. Not only pornography but also many apparently innocent endeavors, like fashion in clothes, ornaments, are decoys to attract Adam: for him to look, to notice, to take her. I do not mean here the "taking" in a strictly sexual sense. The modern Eve is less interested in the mere sexual pleasure of the contact with Adam, than in assuring her future. The wish of Eve is simply the desire of marriage, of a safeguard for her whole life.

Adam's purely sexual reaction deceives Eve, who expecting a life safeguard is assumed only for a moment. How many times Eve falls victim to deception. Adam replies: "But I did not rape her, she wanted it herself!" This may be true, but Eve wanted Adam to react, to react not only in such a way.

Eve now tempts, tries to attract, ensnare Adam. She knows how to do it without special schooling, she has it in her blood. She stands before him naked, uncovers her beauty and keeps the eyes of Adam riveted on herself. Adam, contemplating Eve, may not notice anything else besides her beauty, anything besides her and in her. He abandons everything else and for a moment of intoxication elopes with her.

One could write whole libraries about the tragic fate, misunderstandings and wrongs, which follow. I do not want to mention here the tragic fate of the child which could be the unexpected result of this meeting. Eve leads in this way both Adam and herself to sin, she breaks the holy covenant with God and remains alone. Even if she remains with Adam it is a contact which leads them both – let's not be afraid to speak explicitly - to a life that is truly infernal - here and afterwards. Jesus speaks clearly about this Reality: where there will be "eternal weeping and grinding of teeth". How few people, even believers, are conscious of this truth.

The tragic fate of humanity is caused by woman, by Eve! And this humanity would be condemned, if it were not for another woman - Mary.

3. Eve – Mary

One woman, Eve, follows Satan. The other, Mary, "crushes his head" and saves humanity. Womanhood exercises two totally different influences: one destroys, the other saves; one pushes towards darkness, the other leads to light. Light and darkness are always struggling.

There exist two poles of womanhood: Eve and Mary.

In every woman there exist these two possibilities: each possesses with herself something of Eve and something of Mary. It depends on herself in which direction she will develop. This is what I mean speaking of womanhood as a task. This is not a passive attitude, which says: "I am as I am", but a constant striving to dominate in herself and in Adam those mechanisms which can lead to destruction. Sometimes this means fighting.

It is not easy to be a woman!

Here I shall permit myself a personal anecdote. We had at school a charming teacher of religion, an old priest, who one day, while his twelve year old pupils were quarrelling, told us, shaking his head: "Girls, girls, remember that it is more difficult, for a woman to become a real person!" It is more difficult, if we call personhood the capacity of self possession and self domination. Dominated by biological forces the woman, to become fully herself, must overcome the biologically steered mechanisms of her body and heart. In spite of appearances, woman is much more dependent on her body than man. The great vocation of woman to maternity is at the same time subjected to forces of nature, forces of biology. This happens in her and the action of hormones independent from the woman's will exercises an influence upon her physical and affective reactions. In the great event of conception the woman's role, although indispensable, is equivalent to a total subjection to forces quite independent from her. The child grows in her by itself, it makes for itself the right conditions for existence and is born itself from her. The mother, subjected passively to all this, has only to accept what has happened, as the Girl from Nazareth, Mary, did it long ago. Every mother has to say "I shall" ("Fiat") and the rest happens by itself.

Both these women, Eve and Mary, are mothers. Eve and Mary meet in motherhood, identify and find in it the simplest and safest way to full realization of womanhood as a task. Eve through motherhood recovers the great role of saving, fulfilled by Mary. Through participation in the great work of Creation Eve, like Mary, becomes a vessel full of the Holy Spirit. In every woman-mother's body the Holy Spirit is at work, in the mystery of her womb. The modern man, fascinated by biology and its discoveries, forgot that the child is not a product of biological reaction, it is not only a connection of two gametes, although that conjunction is necessary - but it is the fruit of the action of three persons: the father, the mother and the Spirit which breathes new life, giving the child its soul and the form in the image of God. John Paul II speaks often of the sanctity of every woman's body.

The modern Eve is often quite lacking in this consciousness, which should defend Adam from the reaction of sexual desire. If every Adam had this consciousness with regard to every Eve, his reaction would be a reaction of pure admiration and gratitude: admiration for Eve and gratitude to God for the gift of Eve. Eve is a gift for Adam, but a gift for his salvation, not for his play.

The directing of woman towards motherhood is an eternal plan of the Creator. The destruction of this vocation is the destruction of her essential substance. Deprived of spiritual and biological motherhood, she feels lost, searches feverishly for something to replace it and does not find it. Feminist movements which are opposed to motherhood are in reality subjected to a suicidal tendency. Deprived of the role of a mother - who is a woman to be?

4. Eve as mother

Motherhood is not only a biological transmission of life. Eve as mother has an enormous influence upon the forming of the child's attitudes, the hierarchy of values and full personality. Adam is directed to the world of things. According to God's order, he subjects the earth. Eve, directed towards the world of persons, influences persons: she may lead them toward values, i.e. toward God, or towards : anti-values, against God. The great educative power, which is woman's attribute, is her task. She is to educate her child, feeding it not only with her body, but also with her soul. This spiritual maternity is the task of every woman. The development of woman is maturing towards this spiritual maternity. From the attitude of a child, which is not able to give anything but receives and takes everything, the little woman must grow into a mature person, in whom the attitude of taking changes into that of a giver. Woman has the ability and possibility of transmitting a world of values, but only insofar as she understands that world and identifies with it. Gifted with intuition, that is deepened by the foresight of love, Eve is able to find an efficient way to influence the world of persons. She may become a model for her child and a help for people. This happens only when she herself has the right hierarchy of values. Sometimes it happens that woman too easily submits to her intuition only and acts under the influence of affective reactions without rational thinking. The task of Eve is to submit all the riches of her feelings to the judgment of her conscience directed from above. All this treasury of feminine sentiment Eve must submit to that power which Mary reveals, i.e. the force of humility and obedience. However, this obedience is not directed towards Adam, but towards God himself. Mary is totally obedient to God - and Eve may recover in this obedience the whole hierarchy of values. Holiness is humble, and sin is full of pride. Eve must look for God in humility.

5. Eve and God

Every human person from the beginning of his or her existence is in an immediate relation to God as creature with regard to its Creator. This dependence vanishes from human consciousness, since God in His gentle kindness and fidelity does not accentuate His power over man. God gave humans a liberty which He does not retract, even if man directs his liberty against God. This relation of creature towards the Creator nevertheless exists. Woman through motherhood is the direct link, connecting man with God, she is the means of the transmission of life and may become the means of the transmission of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Modern feminism demanding the priesthood of women reveals a complete ignorance of the role of women and of woman's possibilities.

The man has a chance of immediate contact with God only when as priest, by the power given him by God, with his work he brings God down on earth during the Mass. The woman has a chance to become herself a vessel of grace when in her child and to Adam. Like Mary, Eve can give God when she teaches her child the faith, when she brings her husband to the sacrament of penance, to the Eucharist, when she makes her home a center of gentleness and sanctity.

Conscious of her power over Adam, and at the same time conscious of who she is by the grace of God, Eve, like Mary, is to help Adam of all times to find the straight path to God. Humanity is saved by Mary, the Mother of the Savior. Mary, becoming a mother, fulfills God's will. That is Eve's program. With a mother's heart she is to embrace all people and fulfill the will of God. In this task Eve retrieves herself. Eve has no reason to imitate Adam, she does not gain anything, wanting to be like him. The tendency of Eve to identify with Adam is fictitious. Eve must find her own identity.

6. Eve's identity

Who are you, Eve? How much has been written about her. Every one has some ideal of womanhood, some model of Eve, everyone expects something from the woman, and she herself wants something from herself and for herself. Personally I think that the right form of womanhood is the

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harmony of what we think, when pondering on Eve and when contemplating Mary. The right balance between these two attitudes gives the right profile of womanhood. Eve, although a decoy for Adam under this condition, in full consciousness of herself tends towards holiness. Eve, mediating between the Father and the child, transmitting the laws of love ready to give everything, is suffering everything like Mary under the Cross. Eve, as this woman, (hic mulier) who industriously cares for all the needs of man, feeds, clothes, educates, defends, may become too absorbed by these details. That is why she has to learn from Mary to see reality in another way, to choose the better part. Under her influence Adam should learn disinterested love, to embrace Eve, like Joseph teaches him to be a father; like Mary, she must liberate in him an attitude of care and responsibility for her and the child.

Eve has therefore the task of educating herself, Adam and their children and thus the whole world. Womanhood embraces the world, and the human world becomes what the woman makes it. One might say that humanity receives its coloring from woman.

If the world of the twentieth century is a world of aggression, the color of blood, this results from the tragic contemporary tendency of "liberating woman from motherhood". To speak metaphorically, the "hands of the modern woman are stained with the blood of the innocent". The world is depressed by the vision of the woman who kills or allows Adam to kill her child. Warm, maternal hands are not extended today towards the baby. The fate of the modern woman is oppressed by the tragedy of denying motherhood. Rebuilding this value demands a great effort. It is easy to destroy, but a creative work needs sacrifice.

Rewarding a woman for becoming like a man in action, for knowing also how to kill and destroy, does not improve her fate. Woman must recover her identity totally and independently from the masculine model, totally different, according to the plan of God for her. Woman can find herself in man's eyes only when those eyes express admiration for the essential values she possesses, and not only for bodily form. Eve must resign from the easy pleasure of pleasing Adam, and must awaken in him the depth of reverence for God's work. Eve must understand the meaning of her own body, the sanctity of her body and must treat it as an authentic treasure, with which she can present her bridegroom, chosen by God. Eve must liberate the look of lust in Adam's eyes from the tendency to usurp.

Modern Eve should change the coloring of the world, from the rapacious aggressive red of pornography to the sky-blue of Mary. Eve may cover this natural redness of blood by delicate modesty. Modesty does not deprive Eve of anything, also with regard to Adam. Virginity attracts Adam, since it possesses an undoubtedly enchanting charm of innocence and freshness. The Cantic of Canticles /Song of Songs / speaks of woman as a closed garden, a sealed fountain. This is undoubtedly metaphorical, but allows us to understand better the role of womanhood. Eve can recover herself in the quiet contemplation of a retreat and it is only on a very special occasion, at a chosen time that she chooses to reveal herself. Eve should appear to Adam as a mystery, whose depth attracts him and could awaken in him not desire, but a wish of deeper knowledge. Eve, who will understand herself, her own value, her vocation, only then fulfills her role and can influence the fate of the world.

Mary is the center of the battle of good and evil, and Eve should become her successor.

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