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The World Needs The Feminine Genius

On the occasion of the last International Women's day, the prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarria wrote an article, which was reproduced in the Nigerian daily, The Guardian.

28/03/2006

The 8th March is a date which refers to the past, because it recalls the already long history of the efforts to overcome discrimination against the woman: a task which also affects the

present time. What is more, we need to look to the future to imagine what will happen and how many benefits will accrue when the woman is fully incorporated into all fields of society.

But, above all, we need to start off from the recognition of equal dignity between man and woman. From the very beginning of Sacred Scripture, in the accounts of Genesis, it is revealed to us that God has created man and woman as two ways of being a person, two expressions of a common humanity.

The woman is image of God, neither more nor less than the man, and the two are called to identification with Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man.

With these essential premises of Christian faith, one understands much more deeply what a perversion it is to ill-treat any human person, man or woman. The bad treatment

sometimes takes on violent forms and, at other times, very subtle modes: business is done brutally with the body of the woman, considering her as a thing, not as a person; or else she is made to know, nicely but insidiously, that a pregnancy is incompatible with her work contract. There continue to be many reasons to remember the need to oppose these discriminations.

Also in Genesis we find a second fundamental and evident element: diversity. Let us think, for example, of the family: the father and mother carry out different tasks, equally necessary, but not interchangeable. The responsibility is the same, but the way of participation is different.

It is often said that one of the most acute problems of the family in our day consists precisely in the crisis of fatherhood. The man can not be regarded as "a second mother",

neither should he neglect the responsibilities of the home, but he needs to learn to be a father. Something similar can be said of the society as a whole, where each one has to find his or her position. The man possesses the right to develop as a man; the woman, as a woman. Always without leaving room for mimicry which produces identity crisis, psychological complexes and social problems of great transcendence.

The principle of equality can defeat itself and lose its equilibrium, when equality (of dignity, rights, and opportunities) is confused with the dissolution of diversity. If the woman becomes the same as the man, or the man as the woman, the two are disorientated and don't know how to relate to each other. But the principle of difference can also be defeated %oÛ" and in fact it has been very many times- when the distinction is

understood as a basis for justifying discrimination.

In his context it becomes opportune and necessary to consider the Christian virtue of charity, which Benedict XVI has wanted to situate at the beginning and in the centre of his pontificate. Charity helps to harmonise equality and difference and invites collaboration because it orders the relationship with God and also the relationship of each one with the rest of mankind. From charity, the Church promotes communion, respect, understanding, openness to diversity, mutual help, and service.

In the first words of Genesis we read also that God, in his goodness, entrusts the world to man and woman. We have received the mission to take care of the world together and to make it progress. This exciting shared project helps to situate the question of the relations

between the two sexes. We are not faced with a matter closed in on itself, narrow and problematic, but rather an open and positive one: with equal responsibilities with contributions suitable for their own genius, we have to work together for a better society. This picture shows that discrimination against the woman represents not only an offence to her: it constitutes a disgrace also for man and a very serious problem for the world. The true desire to develop together the task of caring for the world and making it progress, requires the abandonment of manichean schemes and tendencies to conflicts. What are needed are attitudes of dialogue, co-operation, delicacy and sensitivity. Man has to demand more from himself: listening, understanding, being patient, thinking of the person. The woman also needs to understand, to be patient, to exceed herself in a constructive dialogue,

and to take advantage of her rich intuition.

Probably the two should reject the models proposed by some dominant stereotypes: those images that push men to compete with harshness, or that invite the woman to behave with frivolity, or even with a disgraceful exhibitionism. We need a new way of thinking, a new way of looking at others, that overcomes dominion and seduction. In this way a new social scenario will arise, without conquerors or conquered.

In the Letter to Women, John Paul II pointed out that the woman's contribution was indispensable for "the elaboration of a culture capable of reconciling reason and sentiment", and also for "the building of economic and political structures more enriched with humanity". The feminine genius, with this innate aptitude for knowing, understanding

and caring for neighbour, has to extend its influence to the family and the whole of society.

Saint Josemaria used to remind us that "before God, no occupation is in itself big or small. Everything acquires the value of the Love with which it is done". When we discover that the important thing is the person, discriminations of all kinds will have their days numbered. The Christian faith possesses the capacity to be true ferment of a cultural change in this field, if we men and women of faith know how to incarnate it in our ordinary life.

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