

## Family and work: sharing tasks

The essential equality between men and women demands an understanding of the complementary roles which they play in the Church's growth and in the progress of society.

05/07/2009

The essential equality between men and women demands an understanding of the complementary roles which they play in the Church's growth and in the progress of society.

Not in vain did God make them man and woman. This diversity should be considered not in a ‘patriarchal’ sense, but in its full, rich depth of tones and consequences. In this way men are freed from the temptation of ‘masculinizing’ the Church and society, and women from seeing their mission in the People of God and in the world as no more than showing that they can do equally well the tasks which were formerly reserved to men. I think that both men and women should rightly consider themselves as the protagonists in the history of salvation, but each complementing the work of the other.

*Conversations, 14*

## **Family priority**

Firstly, let me say that I do not think there need be any conflict between one’s family life and social life. Just as in a man’s life, but with particular

shades of difference, the home and the family will always occupy a central place in the life of a woman. For it is obvious that when she spends time on her family she is fulfilling a great human and Christian role. Nevertheless, this does not exclude the possibility of her having other professional work — for housework is also professional work — in any worthwhile employment available in the society in which she lives. I can understand why you state the problem the way you do. But I think that if we systematically contrast work in the home with outside work, retaining the old dichotomy which was formerly used to maintain that a woman's place was in the home but switching the stress, it could easily lead, from the social point of view, to a greater mistake than that which we are trying to correct because it would be more serious if it led women to give up their work in the home.

## **Torn between many tasks**

This very real feeling is frequently due to particular limitations which we all have because we are human: it comes because we lack well-determined ideals capable of guiding our whole life, or because of a subconscious pride. At times, we would like to be outstanding in everything. And since this is impossible, it leads to confusion and anxiety, or even depression and boredom: you cannot do ten things at the same time, you do not know which to do, and you end up doing nothing well. In this situation, jealousy can develop, one's imagination easily becomes escapist and seeks refuge in fantasy which, leaving reality far behind, ends up weakening one's will-power. It is what I have repeatedly called 'mystical wishful thinking', made up

of useless day dreams and empty ideals: If only I hadn't married, if only I did not have this job, if only I had better health, or was younger, or had more time!

Like everything valuable the solution is costly. It lies in the search for the true centre of human life, which can give priority, order and meaning to everything. We find this centre in our relations with God by means of a genuine interior life. By making Christ the centre of our lives, we discover the meaning of the mission he has entrusted to us. We have a human ideal that becomes divine. New horizons of hope open up in our life and we come to the point of sacrificing willingly, not just this or that aspect of our activity, but our whole life, thus giving it, paradoxically, its deepest fulfilment.

## **The answer: be organised and have ideals**

The problem you pose is not confined to women. At some time or other, many men experience the same sort of thing with slightly different characteristics. The source of the trouble is usually the same lack of a high ideal that can only be discovered with God's light.

But smaller remedies, which seem trivial, must also be used. When there are lots of things to do you have to establish priorities, to get organised. Many difficulties stem from downright disorder. There are women who do hundreds of things and all of them well because they are well organised and have courageously imposed order on all their work. They know how to concentrate at each moment on what they have to do, without getting worried about what is round the

corner, or what they might have been able to do before. Others are overwhelmed by all that there is to do, and because they are overwhelmed, they do nothing.

*Conversations, 88*

## **Equality and diversity**

Development, maturity, emancipation of women should not mean a pretence of equality, of uniformity with men, a servile imitation of a man's way of doing things. That would not get us anywhere. Women would turn out losers, not because they are better than men or worse, but because they are different.

Nevertheless, on this basis of fundamental equality, each must achieve what is proper to him or her. In this sense a woman's emancipation means that she should have a real possibility of developing

her own potentialities to the fullest extent — those which she has personally and those which she has in common with other women. Equal rights and equal opportunities before the law do not suppress this diversity, which enriches all mankind. They presuppose and encourage it.

*Conversations, 87*

## **Bringing up children together**

Parents should find time to spend with their children, to talk with them. They are the most important thing — more important than business or work or rest. In their conversations, parents should make an effort to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to recognize the fact that their children are sometimes partly right — or even completely right — in some of their rebellious attitudes. At the same time, they should help their children to direct their efforts

and to carry out their projects properly, teaching them to consider things and to reason them out. It is not a matter of imposing a line of conduct, but rather of showing the human and supernatural motives for it. In a word, parents have to respect their children's freedom, because there is no real education without personal responsibility, and there is no responsibility without freedom.

*Christ is Passing By*, 27

## **Living in the present**

What was I concerned about? I replied that I felt no concern, for I had concerns enough to keep me busy.

*Furrow*, 511

## **Coping with everything**

You are going through a critical stage. You feel a certain vague fear

and find it difficult to adapt your plan of life. Your work seems to weigh you down, since twenty-four hours are not enough to do everything you ought to each day.

Have you tried following the Apostle's advice: "let all things be done decently and according to order"? That means, in the presence of God, with Him, through Him, and only for Him.

*Furrow, 512*

---

pdf | document generated automatically from <https://opusdei.org/en-nz/article/family-and-work-sharing-tasks/> (02/09/2026)