

## Woman's Capacity for Knowledge of the Mystery of the Cross in St. Thomas Aquinas and Bl. Josemaría Escrivá

*Pia de Solenni*

*Catholic Information Center, Washington. USA*

In the eyes of the world, the Church is often considered to be backwards and behind the times. We see this particularly in the case of feminism. Time and time again, people comment that perhaps the Church will catch up with the rest of the world and begin ordaining women as a sign of their equality. The Church, however, wisely knows that equality need not mean sameness. In fact, most of its members clearly recognize significant differences between men and women.

The Church has always recognized the almost exclusive presence of women at the foot of the cross. It has been represented in art, prayer, music, and writing. It's only lately that we've forgotten it.

When Josemaría Escrivá originally founded Opus Dei in 1928, he did not include women. Two years later, he came to understand that Opus Dei should include women "so that the fullness of the contemplation of God in all walks of life would come to fulfillment". His high esteem for women is most forcefully recognized in n. 982 of *The Way*:

"Woman is stronger than man and more faithful in the hour of trial: Mary Magdalen and Mary Cleophas and Salome.

With a group of valiant women like these, closely united to our sorrowful Mother, what work for souls could be done in the world!"

Escrivá's intuition was also confirmed by Pope Paul VI at the end of the Second Vatican Council. Paul VI explained:

"The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at his moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity from falling"<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> PAUL VI, *Messaggi finali del Concilio*. "Alle donne" (8 dicembre 1965).

Following this same spirit, John Paul II devoted a substantial part of his pontificate to launching and encouraging a “new feminism”. In *Evangelium Vitae* 99, he states:

“In transforming the culture so that it supports life, *women* occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to pronounce a “new feminism” which rejects the temptation of imitating models of “male domination”, in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation”.

Bishop Álvaro del Portillo commented on the link between the inclusion of women in Opus Dei and John Paul II’s focus on the central role that woman plays in the new evangelization. Bishop del Portillo cites two texts from *Mulieris dignitatem*. 1. Woman has been given the role of a privileged witness in the order of love<sup>2</sup>. 2. To her, our Lord entrusts the human being in a particular way<sup>3</sup>.

At the crux of the feminine question (and the masculine question) is the question of what really makes men and women different. We’ve already proven that women can do just about everything that a man can do. But whatever she does, she does it as a woman, not as a man. This is most obviously seen in environments in which a man or a woman participates in an environment that has been traditionally dominated by the opposite sex.

The concept of woman as “helper” stated by the Genesis, has come to mean little more than a housemaid or servant. Similarly, the virtues of passivity and receptivity have taken on a particularly derogatory connotation in the past two centuries. We must rethink these notions.

The language of Scripture imitates the language of a bride receiving her groom to illustrate the relation of every human soul before God. Every creature is passive or receptive in so far as it receives its very being from the Creator. This does not mean that every human being is essentially feminine. Rather it indicates that there is something particularly feminine that all human beings are called to imitate. Man and woman share many of the same characteristics without losing their particular masculinity or femininity. In fact, they can learn from each other and share a life together without forgoing what is proper to each respectively. Perhaps the response of the soul to God is something that woman is able to teach man. Mary, the mother of God, does so with her *fiat*. At the same time, she witnesses her particular understanding of the beginning of the mystery of the cross. Other women in the Gospel follow suit. John Paul II explains:

“Christ speaks to women about the things of God, and they understand them; there is a true resonance of mind and heart, a response of faith. Jesus expresses appreciation and admiration for this distinctly ‘feminine’ response...

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Ap. Lett. *Mulieris dignitatem*, 15.8.1988, 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, 30.

Sometimes he presents this lively faith, filled with love, as an example. *He teaches, therefore, taking as his starting-point this feminine response of mind and heart*<sup>4</sup>.

John Paul II's theology of the body is rooted, perhaps rather surprisingly, in the thought of a 13<sup>th</sup> century master: Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas's anthropology views the union between mind and body, spirit and soul, as something absolutely essential to human nature. In fact, they are so intimately connected that "our being as persons is conditioned by natural gender differences". Gender determines how we see and come to know ourselves as persons.

In his epistemology and anthropology, Aquinas lays the groundwork for an integral feminism which could be used to explain the intuitions of Escrivá and to develop John Paul II's call for a new feminism. His epistemology (philosophy of how we come to know) is central to his anthropology because the human being is created for the purpose of knowing<sup>5</sup>. He follows and develops Aristotle's thought that it is in our nature to know. Ultimately, the human being can know God. For this reason we have been given our intellectual faculties in virtue of which we are also created in the image of God.

Aquinas explains that in the mind, there is no difference between the sexes. The mind is the same for man and woman<sup>6</sup>. Knowing is a process which also involves the body because all human knowledge begins with sense experience; so it involves our entire being: body and soul. The soul is the form of the body, it makes the body human<sup>7</sup>. It's the intellectual part, but it is informed through the senses, i.e. through the body. In this way the soul and body are intricately united. Epistemology is, therefore, central to Aquinas's consideration of human nature and its activity because it is the study of the activity that belongs to each of us as a composite whole of body and soul. Knowing exists for the knower and it requires the use of the knower's capabilities.

For Aquinas, the object of knowledge will retain some characteristic of the subject because everything comes to be known in a way that is particular to each

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> ST I, q.92, a.1, c.: "Homo autem adhuc ordinatur ad nobilior opus vitae, quod est intelligere". Cfr. *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*, proemium: "Sicut omnes homines naturaliter scire desiderant veritatem, ita naturale desiderium inest hominibus fugiendi errores..."; Cfr. *X Ethicorum*, VIII, 2111.

<sup>6</sup> ST I, q.93, a.6, ad 2: "Ad imaginem Dei creavit illum, addidit masculinum et feminam creavit eos, non ut imago Dei secundum distinctiones sexuum attendatur, sed quia imago Dei utrique sexui est communis, cum sit secundum mentem in qua non est distinctio sexuum".

<sup>7</sup> ST I, q.76, a.1, c.: "Dicendum quod necesse est dicere quod intellectus, qui est intellectualis operationis principium, sit humani corporis forma [...] Relinquitur ergo quod intellectivum principium sit propria hominis forma". N.b. Aquinas says here that the soul *is* the form of the body, not that it *forms* the body.

subject<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, humans know in one way and angels know in another because they are different types of subjects. If we continue this line of thought, we realize that although all human subjects share the same nature, there is something particular in the way that each human subject knows specifically<sup>9</sup>. From our experience we know that, given varying intellectual capabilities, individual men and women will know the same thing in different ways.

We are the composite of body and soul; so, even if our intellectual powers are limited or stifled, we are still human and our soul still has the potentiality or disposition of a rational soul. Someone who exists in a vegetative state, for example, remains a human being. The child who cannot yet reason is still a human being. A mentally deficient or retarded person is still a human being. An inebriated person does not stop being a human being because the intellect or reason is impeded. Despite the imperfections of a human's cognitive powers, the human nonetheless remains fully human. So even though the intellect or the mind is not actualized, the essence of the soul is not altered. Someone with unactualized or extremely limited cognitive powers is still a human being. Because nothing of the nature of the human soul changes with regards to the actualization of the mind, the mind is not the essence of the soul. Rather, it is a power or capability of the human soul.

While the mind is not the essence of the human soul, it is the most characteristic faculty of the human soul and, principally through the mind, the soul arrives at perfection<sup>10</sup>. This doesn't mean that we all need graduate degrees to perfect our soul. Rather, it means that each one of us is called to know God according to our particular gifts. For this reason, Aquinas nuances his discussion of the nature of the mind. Generally speaking, there is a way in which the mind is passive or receptive, it suffers, it receives both as intellect and as reason. Aquinas discusses the three uses of the verb to suffer (*pati*). The first is its most

<sup>8</sup> L. B. ARCHIDEO, "Bases para una antropología femenina", *Acti del IX Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, Vatican City 1991, 102: "La cogitativa entonces al ser una potencia que distingue a una persona de otra por su acción intelectual y volitiva, es decir por lo específico de la naturaleza humana y al constituirse en puente entre la sensibilidad y el entendimiento en el conocer y actuar humanos, tiene que ver fundamentalmente con el orden en la estructura psico-ética de la persona ya que señala sus funciones propiamente humanas."

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. F. VAN STEENBERGHEN, *Epistemology*, New York 1949, p. 61; Cfr. ST I, q.12, a.4, c.: "Cognitum est in cognoscente ad modum cognoscentis." In this text, Aquinas specifically addresses whether created intellect can know the divine essence through natural things. What we know we know according to our *mode* of knowing. For man and woman, this means a knowing that necessarily involves bodily senses.

<sup>10</sup> Note that when speaking of the perfection of the intellect here, the perfection is not one of mere scientific knowledge. Rather, the intellect is the seat of the soul's ability to see and know God. This point will be further developed in this chapter.

proper usage: when something is removed (*removetur*) from that which is fitting to itself, whether according to its nature or to its proper inclination<sup>11</sup>. Because it is fitting, it is something that is essentially good. The examples that Aquinas gives are of water losing its coolness by being heated and when someone becomes ill or is saddened (loses health or joy). According to Aquinas's antiquated physics, it is proper to the nature of water to be cool. It is only made hot by some external force acting on it.

Aquinas example of sickness or sadness is particularly beautiful and striking because it implicitly manifests his human teleology. We are not created to be sick or sad. Health and happiness are proper to our nature and the things toward which we tend. Sickness and sadness are imperfections. The passage indicates that our end is something good and desirable.

The second sense of suffering is less proper and occurs when something is cast away (*abiicitur*) from the thing, whether suitable or unsuitable<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, one suffers when healed because the sickness is removed. Suffering is not limited to the consideration of pain. It plays a part in a larger consideration of being acted upon by another.

The third sense of suffering is when something receives what it is in potency to receive<sup>13</sup>. Something is added to it, either something good or bad. It is said to suffer *communiter*. Anything which passes from potency to act, therefore, suffers in the third sense, i.e. the most common type of suffering. The human is the least perfect of the intellectual beings because it does not know innately. Aristotle calls the human intellect or mind a *tabula rasa* (blank tablet/clean slate) upon which nothing is written when it first comes into existence<sup>14</sup>. Aquinas' third sense of suffering stems from Aristotle's discussion in the *De Anima*<sup>15</sup>. *Intellectus* is potential because, until it knows even the smallest thing, it is not actualized. It is passive or receptive because it comes to know by receiving the forms of things as possessions. *Intellectus* keeps the intellectual forms which, in a sense, become part of it<sup>16</sup>. In this sense of becoming the object, *intellectus* suffers because it receives that which it was not and that which it did not previous-

<sup>11</sup> ST I, q.79, a.2, c.: "Scilicet quando aliquid removetur ab eo quod convenit sibi secundum naturam, aut secundum propriam inclinationem".

<sup>12</sup> ST I, q.79, a.2, c.: "Aliquis pati ex eo quod aliquid ab ipso abiicitur, sive sit ei conveniens."

<sup>13</sup> ST I, q.79, a.2, c.: "Dicitur aliquid pati communiter, ex hoc solo quod id quod est in potentia ad aliquid, recipit illud ad quod erat in potentia, absque hoc quod aliquid abiiciatur. Secundum quem modum, omne quod exit de potentia in actum, potest dici pati, etiam cum perficitur. Et sic intelligere nostrum est pati".

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, 429b29.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In de Anima*, III, ix.722.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, 429a10-25; Cfr. ST I-II, q.22, a.1 c.: "Nam secundum receptionem tantum, dicitur quod sentire et intelligere est quoddam pati."

ly have. It is acted upon and changed. Similarly, *ratio*, until it begins its discursive activity, is passive because its potency has not yet been actualized. The passive element is present, therefore, in both *intellectus* and *ratio*. As Gilson explains, “Intellectual passivity is, then, a natural correlative of limitation of being”<sup>17</sup>.

For Plato, the body only entraps or contains the human soul and obstructs knowing or the process of coming to know. It does not have an essential role in this process. Aquinas, however, follows Aristotle’s view that things come to be in the *intellectus* or mind as they are received through the senses of the body. Everything that man or woman comes to know ultimately has its basis in sense perception<sup>18</sup>. *Intellectus* receives the material, so to speak, for universals and knowledge from particular bodies which are perceived by the body. Although the body in a sense feeds data to the *intellectus* or seems to act on the *intellectus*, it does not participate in the intellectual act *per se*. First, through the senses *intellectus* perceives the being of a thing. Secondly, it perceives the essence of a particular corporeal being through the senses of the body. The agent intellect abstracts, i.e. it separates what is common to all the particulars so as to arrive at the universal which is the common element in all the particulars<sup>19</sup>.

*Intellectus* seeks to apprehend the form of the object because the form gives the essence of the object. Apprehending the form is not the same as separating the objects into their proper categories. Knowing (*intelligere*) requires more than simply apprehending the form. The first step in knowing is the sensing or awareness of the being of the material body. This is the object impressed upon the senses. From it, the phantasm is derived. Then, from the phantasm, the agent intellect draws out what can be known, i.e. the intelligible species.

Without the element of the sensibles, *intellectus* cannot function. The body, therefore, is essential to *intellectus* because the body is necessary for the actualization of the potentiality of the *intellectus*. *Intellectus* is not actualized without the body<sup>20</sup>. Gilson explains, “It is not the intellect that knows. Man through the intellect knows”<sup>21</sup>.

The Pope invites us to consider the particular women in the Gospels. In the first chapter of Luke, the angel Gabriel appears to Zachary and tells him that

<sup>17</sup> E. GILSON, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by L. K. Shook, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana 1994, p. 207.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. J. DANCY - E. SOSA (EDITORS), *A Companion to Epistemology*, Blackwell 1992, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. S. RÁBADE ROMEO, *Estructura del conocer humano*, Madrid 1966, pp. 56-57.

<sup>20</sup> ST I, q.87, a.1, c.: “Intellectus autem humanus se habet in genere rerum intelligibilium ut ens in potentia tantum, sicut et materia prima se habet in genere rerum sensibilium: unde possibilis nominatur”.

<sup>21</sup> E. GILSON, *Wisdom and Love in St. Thomas Aquinas*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 1951, p. 6.



his barren, aged wife will conceive and bear a son. Zachary can't allow himself to be taken in. He asks for a sign.

Gabriel then appears to Mary. She, too, questions him. But she doesn't ask him to prove anything. She allows herself to be taken in. She responds with her *fiat*. And then, she packs up and goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Her passivity is in fact an active receptivity. This is how she begins her knowledge of the mystery of the Cross.

Blessed Josemaría explains that Mary is “the teacher of the sacrifice that is hidden and silent. See her, nearly always in the background, cooperating with her Son: she knows and remains silent”<sup>22</sup>. He further explains her cooperation as something to be imitated when he writes, “*Ecce ancilla*’, behold the handmaid, that’s how all the saints pray”.

Jumping way ahead to John 4, 7-26, to the encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well, it is only to this woman that Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah.

“Believe me, woman, Jesus said to her, the time is coming when you will not go to this mountain, nor yet to Jerusalem, to worship the Father. You worship you cannot tell what, we worship knowing what it is we worship; salvation, after all, is to come from the Jews; but the time is coming, nay, has already come, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; such men as these the Father claims for his worshippers. God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”. “Yes, said the woman, I know that the Messiah (that is, the Christ) is to come; and when he comes, he will tell us everything”. Jesus said to her “, I, who speak to thee, am the Christ”<sup>23</sup>.

Jesus still has not told the disciples who he is, but there is something in the conversation with the woman at the well that seems to bring it out of him.

Mary the sister of Lazarus, is the woman who anoints Jesus' feet, washes them with her tears, and dries them with her hair. Jesus says that her sins are forgiven because of her great love<sup>24</sup>. In Hebrew, the words for mind and heart are the same. So the concept of knowing and loving are intricately united in an intellectual understanding. Similarly, with regards to Mary the mother of God who kept things “in her heart”, heart and mind were often signified with the same word in ancient Hebrew.

St. Thomas Aquinas follows this out in a very interesting question where he ponders whether the resurrection should have been made manifest to all men, *hominibus*<sup>25</sup>. An objector firmly replies that it should've if Jesus went so far as to appear to a lowly woman. Aquinas replies by arguing first from the symbolic fit-

<sup>22</sup> *The Way*, 509.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 4, 21-26.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Jn. 11,2; Mt 26,6; Mk 14,3.

<sup>25</sup> ST III, q.55, a.1.

tingness. But the key argument which he makes is that women do not by virtue of their sex have a lesser share in the state of glory. The more one loves, the greater share in glory that person will have, whether the person is male or female. From Aquinas's perspective, loving and knowing are closely united. The person loves the good because the good is known<sup>26</sup>. The women loved because they understood. They loved so much that they went to the tomb. The men, meanwhile, stayed away<sup>27</sup>.

In the *Catena Aurea*, Aquinas commenting on Luke 24, cites Bede who commented that the women who went to Jesus' tomb give us an example of how we ought always to seek to be near God in spite of our fears<sup>28</sup>. This text indicates that the women were in fact close to God, that they had a personal relationship with him. Their closeness to him strengthened them against their fear and enabled them to understand.

Also in the *Catena Aurea*, Aquinas refers to the parable of the woman who hid the leaven in the three portions of flour. Citing various commentators, he explains that the woman who hid the leaven represents the wisdom of God. In another explanation, the three measures of flour signify knowledge of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Divine wisdom, symbolized both by the woman and the Holy Spirit, increases this knowledge. The woman also symbolizes the Church who hides away the leaven of love (*dilectionis*) in three portions because the Church teaches that we should love God with our entire body, with our entire soul and with all of our strength<sup>29</sup>.

Although the *Catena Aurea* is a compilation of various Scripture commentators and not Aquinas's own commentary, it evidences ideas and concepts which he thought merited consideration. Many of the same concepts he later

<sup>26</sup> ST I-II, q.27, a.2.

<sup>27</sup> ST III, q.55, a.1 ad 3: "Simul etiam per hoc ostenditur quod, quantum ad statum gloriae pertinet, nullum detrimentum patietur sexus femineus, sed, si maiori caritate fervebunt, maiori etiam gloria ex visione divina potentur, eo quod mulieres, quae dominum arctius amaverunt, in tantum ut ab eius saepulcro, discipulis etiam recedentibus, non recederent, primo viderunt dominum in gloriam resurgentem"; also Cfr. *Super Matthaicum* XXVII.55, n. 2399: "Et primo describuntur quoad praeterita, et quoad praesentia. In quo considerandum quod populis recedentibus, mulieres adhaeserunt ita quod impletum est quod dicitur Is. L,2: *Non remansit vir mecum*".

<sup>28</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS *Catena aurea in Lucam*, 24, 1: "Beda. Iuxta intellectum vero mysticum, per hoc quod mulieres valde diluculo veniunt ad monumentum, datur nobis exemplum, discussis vitiorum tenebris, ad domini corpus accedere".

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, 20, 2: "Mulier quae abscondit fermentum, dei sapientia est. Eusebius. ... Tria autem sata farinae significant notitiam patris et filii et spiritus sancti, quam mulier, idest divina sapientia, et spiritus sanctus largitur. Beda. Vel fermentum dilectionem dicit, quae fervere facit, et excitat mentem. Abscondit ergo mulier, idest ecclesia, fermentum dilectionis in sata tria: quia praecepit ut diligamus deum ex toto corde, ex tota anima et ex tota virtute".



develops in his own writings. For example, in various other works, Aquinas maintains that woman represents wisdom. In Book III *Sententiarum*, Aquinas explains that woman personifies divine wisdom, not because of fragility but because of fecundity<sup>30</sup>.

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Aquinas again discusses the manifestation of the resurrection. He lauds Mary Magdalen for her love. He explains that it was fitting that Our Lord first appeared to Mary Magdalen because she loved him so greatly<sup>31</sup>. Her love is certainly not an unknowing love. For Aquinas, all desire and love are a consequence of understanding<sup>32</sup>. In the *Catena Aurea in Ioannem*, Aquinas cites Gregory who says that we must understand how greatly Mary Magdalen's love enlightened her mind. It was this love that made her come to the tomb while everyone else drew back<sup>33</sup>. Aquinas indicates an intricate union of loving and knowing, namely that Mary Magdalen knew more because she loved more and she loved more because she knew more.

Escrivá understood this particularly in the role of the Blessed Mother. He asks, "Who can be a better teacher of love of God than Mary?"<sup>34</sup>.

This is just a cursory glance at the wealth that the Gospels provide us. Most importantly, the Gospels provide us a source and context for each person's narrative. Each of us has a personal story and it's part of a larger story.

Difference understood by John Paul II as a type of complementarity. Man and woman are equal but different. Genesis 3,16 is the basis for explaining the tension that can exist between man and woman: "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you". But this is the consequence of sin. As a result of original sin, man and woman are burdened with an inclination to sin, i.e. "the tendency to go against the moral order which corresponds to the rational nature and dignity of man and woman as person"<sup>35</sup>. Despite this tendency John Paul II explicitly states that given the basis of complementarity or the fact

<sup>30</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, III *Sententiarum*, d.1, q.2, a.5 expos. text.: "Sciendum, quod divina sapientia mulier dicitur, non propter fragilitatem, sed propter fecunditatem".

<sup>31</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis Lectura*, 20.1: "Dicendum secundum Augustinum, quod Maria Magdalena ferventior et devotior erat ad Christum aliis mulieribus: unde Lc. VII, 47 dicitur: *Dimissa sunt ei peccata multa, quoniam dilexit multum*. Et ideo eam Evangelista specialius nominat. Et inde est quod prius ei apparuit Dominus, Mc. ult. [v.9]. Sap. VI, 14: *Praeoccupat eos qui se concupiscunt, ut illis se prior ostendat*". [Emphasis in original text cited].

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. ST I-II, q.27, a.2.

<sup>33</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Catena aurea in Ioannem*, 20,2: "Gregorius In Evang. (hom. 25). Maria autem Magdalene, quae fuerat in civitate peccatrix, amando veritatem laverat lacrymis maculas criminis, cuius mentem magna vis amoris accenderat, quae a monumento Domini, etiam discipulis recedentibus, non recedebat".

<sup>34</sup> *Furrow*, 555.

<sup>35</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, 15,8,1988,10.

that both man and woman are persons, the differences cannot be interpreted such that woman becomes an object of domination and a masculine possession<sup>36</sup>.

The differences between man and woman are creative differences which are intricately united to what it means to be a human person and to have a human story. Thus, John Paul II, being quite aware of the tensions between man and woman, is able to understand the difference in a positive light rather than the negative light which the gender theorists use. Perhaps John Paul II has this positive insight to the complementarity of man and woman because his understanding does not take them out of their proper context, i.e. he considers them as creatures made in the image of God, made to exist together.

In this line of thought, the masculine and feminine differences are appreciated and not made to seem as if they must be changed.

Each of the women in the Gospels had a unique relationship with Jesus. But each was a characteristically spousal relationship. The way in which each woman responded to Jesus was, at base, spousal as a bride. This was the consistent feminine response, one which men may in fact learn from women as member of the Church which is the bride of Christ.

The intuitions of Escrivá also indicate that this feminine response plays a crucial role in the family. In a talk at Tabancura, Santiago, Chile, in 1974, he explained: "Praying mothers are the greatest authority in the world". He also asserts that mothers are largely responsible for the school of piety or the child's religious formation. This is made manifest by a glance at the role of his own mother in his spiritual formation.

In a highly sensitive comment, he explains that wives should even consider their husbands as their smallest child, treating them with love, with care, with tenderness and energy. This instruction could easily be misunderstood if it is not seen in light of his deep devotion to the Blessed Mother and her particular feminine gifts which all women are called to fully develop<sup>37</sup>. Obviously, the Blessed Mother's devotion to Jesus and Joseph did not prevent them from manifesting their masculinity or their devotion to her. Also, Escrivá's understanding of the childlike spirituality is particularly demanding, "Refine the manners of my soul: within the sturdy manliness of this life of childhood, give me — I want you to give me — the gentleness and affection that children show towards their parents in their intimate outpourings of love"<sup>38</sup>.

If we are to indeed develop a new feminism, consideration must be given to these significant differences. Even when they perform the same tasks or jobs, it is still a woman or a man who undertakes that task. Respective femininity and

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*: "For whenever man is responsible for offending a woman's personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and vocation".

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. *Conversations*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> *The Way*, 883.

masculinity cannot be separated from any work, task, or role. There will never simply be a neuter human being who does something. It will always be a woman or a man.

Aquinas' thought helps to develop a systematic understanding of this and for this reason, John Paul II bases his anthropology on the Thomistic understanding. Escrivá made manifest that this could also be intuited from simple observations of Our Lady's role and of the relations within the family. All of these systems of thought can do nothing but encourage us in developing and remembering our understanding of woman and her particular role. Hopefully, this will also encourage the development or rediscover a corresponding masculinism which all of these men clearly lived or are living.

In fact the women at the Cross along with the crucified Christ could be said to be a paradigm of the fulfillment of the masculine and feminine vocations.