



46. “Non erigitur vir, nisi per feminam” – Man will not be redeemed unless by a redeemed woman

The importance of the text: The text that follows is impressive because it offers such a comprehensive overall view of connected realities in salvation history, as well as the present cultural importance of the relationship between man and woman. Mary, woman’s mission, the sexual identity of man and woman, and the conflict between the realm of the devil and the kingdom of God, are all discussed and connected with one another in a mental synopsis.

From a pedagogical point-of-view, against the background of a social situation that has been made very unsure in these matters, the text helps us to strengthen our masculine or feminine identity.

The historical background:

After his return from exile in Milwaukee, Fr Kentenich spent two months in Rome before he was allowed to return to Schoenstatt on Christmas Eve. While he was in Rome, the second session of the Vatican Council was in progress. He used the month of December to call together and train the superiors of the various Schoenstatt Institutes. The talk of 17 December 1965 (p.184-195), which we have chosen, was primarily addressed to the women’s communities (the Sisters of Mary and the Institute of Our Lady of Schoenstatt).

What is more important for our present culture is the question: How can I as a virginal woman carry out my mission towards the opposite sex, indeed, towards the entire culture of our time and world? So the question is addressed more to the other sex, and, in a wider sense, to the whole of our present culture. It is a culture, as we all know, that has been thoroughly shaken and has lost its roots.

I want to begin with a quote from Sacred Scripture. I will then turn to my left and right in order to explain to some extent what God wants to give the present world through us, the little Marys. Let

me quote what the Scriptures tell us about the fall of the angels. Once the angels had sinned, Michael thrust them onto the earth.

What does that mean: He thrust them onto the earth? First of all, it means that he cast them into hell. However, it also means that they were cast among human beings, so that they could carry out their unique mission among them.¹¹ Is that the meaning of the words? At any rate it is in keeping with the opinion of Sacred Scripture and the tradition about the fallen angels. What matters above all is what was added: “And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman”.¹²

We must pause here. He pursued the woman! An ancient saga relates – even though it is a legend, it contains a very profound meaning – that if a snake loses its way among a group of people, it always makes its way first of all to a woman.

1. What do those words mean: He pursued the woman? By “woman” is meant first and foremost the Blessed Mother. He pursued the Blessed Mother. What does that presuppose? Although it is not stated in the Scriptures, theologians deduce it from the total structure of the order of salvation. There is a general law: If in his overflowing love God offers us a gift from his riches, he usually attaches a test before he makes such a gift permanent. If this gift is to become permanent, it depends on whether created beings fulfil this law.

Let us start by applying this law to the endowment of our first parents. How richly they were endowed! However, before this endowment became permanent, they had to pass the test. Think of all we know about original sin and the state of humankind before and after original sin.

Now if we apply this to the angels, also here the general law had to apply. They had been richly, superabundantly endowed. Please recall Church teaching in the chapter on the angels. So the law of being tested applied here too. We are not told by the Scriptures what that trial was. We can understand it to some extent from the total structure of the order of salvation. There are many theologians who maintain that God the eternal Father revealed his plan of salvation to the angels. He told them his intention to elevate a created being so high above them that he would be the incarnate Son of God. Which created being was that? The human nature of the God-Man. And from which human being was the God-Man to adopt his human nature? From the Blessed Mother. This information was at the same time a sort of test for the angels. We will probably understand what theologians tell us: Lucifer and his followers got up and objected to God’s plans, because they thought: If God is to unite himself with a created nature, it can only be ours!

If you want to hold onto these thoughts – we may do so, because there is no prohibition to thinking through the order of salvation on our own – please understand what those words imply: “He pursued the woman!” The woman, that is, the Blessed Mother from whom the second Person in the Godhead was to adopt his human nature. He pursued the woman and in the woman the Blessed Mother. A thought we need to add is this: The devil didn’t know when the Blessed Mother

¹¹ Cf. Rev 12,9.

¹² Rev. 12,13.

would appear on earth. When the first woman came, he thought that Eve was the woman he had to pursue. So he used all his power and malice to bring this woman, from whom he believed the second Person in the Godhead was to adopt his human nature, onto his side.

He pursued the woman! Please do not forget – and we are told this not just by theology, but also by philosophy and psychology – how important woman is for man. People like to point out how Eve influenced Adam, and the extent to which Adam was dependent on the influence of the woman.

He pursued the woman! We are justified in saying that he pursued not just the Blessed Mother, but also all who are made in her image, all who share the same sex as the Blessed Mother. He pursued the woman! From this we can understand that when the devil wants to influence a whole culture, the whole of humankind, he pursues woman in the first place. If he remains true to himself in any way – and, as someone who is an expert on natural law, he also considers the inner relationship between man and woman – we can take it for granted that he will exercise a tremendous influence on woman in order to bring about the fall of man. Once he has caught woman in his net, or if she offers herself to him as an instrument in his hand, the event of the Fall will be repeated on countless occasions. He pursued the woman!

If we recognise inwardly that these thoughts are correct, we will feel what our mission is, whether this concerns our own family or our own sex. As a women's movement we have the primary task to help to exemplify the little Mary in countless forms to the present-day world. As a whole we have the task of seeing to it that a little Mary is "carved" again and again from the women **of today**. The great task to exemplify the little Mary is, at the same time, a living and flagrant protest against the way the devil is demonising our sex. That was the first thought.

2. A second thought! We are dealing all the time with the influence of woman on man, and hence on our culture as a whole. A second quotation to illustrate this point.

There is a statement – it comes from Goethe – which we all know well: "**The eternal feminine beckons us on**".¹³ Allow me to interpret these words in a way I think hits the nail on the head. I would have to say: The eternal in woman beckons us on! The eternal in woman! It is possible to distinguish between something eternal and something temporal in woman, and to see the temporal as diabolical. So if I look at woman under the domination of the devil, the diabolical, it is obvious that femininity does not draw us upwards, but downwards. What is the eternal in woman? It is what I would like to describe with three expressions: All soul, all self-surrender, all purity. This eternal quality in woman beckons man on, draws him upwards.

Allow me to formulate these thoughts in another way. I am now adopting a saying from the treasure of St Bernard's [of Clairvaux] thought. He expressed these thoughts more clearly, in more religious and Catholic terms, when he said: "*Non erigitur vir nisi per feminam!*" – Man will not be redeemed unless by a redeemed woman. This has to be seen as a general law.

¹³ Final lines of Goethe: *Faust*, Part Two, Act V. Translated by Martin Greenberg, Yale University Press 1998.

Of course, you will now ask the critical question as to how the expression was meant at that moment. Man had fallen into sin; he was torn out of the order of redemption. How? Through the woman. Although things could have been different, he did in fact fall through the agency of the woman. Of course, we can also prove that man came to the decision on his own. That is obvious. However, the occasion for it was ultimately the woman. Since man did not fall without the fallen woman – *non erigitur vir nisi per feminam* – he will not be redeemed in the fullest sense of the word unless through the agency of a woman, through the Blessed Mother.

It seems to me that we should make these thoughts our favourite ones; we should see to it that they do not just rule our minds, but also sink into our hearts, indeed, into our hands and feet. Unless we become the living embodiment of objective truths, we may not count upon making our way unscathed through our present-day world. Once again this is a reason that urges us to emphasise the “*esse in se*”,¹⁴ to remain united, to live and love our world together, to penetrate realities with our minds, and, while taking in all originality and spontaneity, to exemplify to one another what a redeemed woman, a little Mary, is like.

Of course, the problem lies with the word “today”. If she were living today, not just in Nazareth as at that time, but, let’s say, in Berlin, or in all the centres of our present culture, what would the Blessed Mother do?

Non erigitur vir nisi per feminam! These words also apply to me, they apply to all of us. I may be as masculine as possible, I will not be redeemed without the Blessed Mother. Man did not fall without the woman, so he will also not be redeemed without her.

Let me take the next step. *Non erigitur vir nisi per feminam!* Will you be able to understand immediately what I am now going to say? Man will not be redeemed without the little Mary. The redeemed woman, the truly redeemed woman, must also try to redeem man through her being. If you like, you can rephrase the saying we know from Paul’s teaching, and repeat: No longer I live, the Blessed Mother lives in me!¹⁵ The great Mary lives in the little Mary.

If we have deeply understood and thought through these related thoughts, so that we are unable to think anything else, so that they are no longer stuck on and we have to exert ourselves to call them to mind; if we live in them like a fish in water or the birds in the air; if this world has become our world to such an extent that we are simply at home in it, we will ultimately be citizens of another world. “Your homeland is in heaven.”¹⁶ We will then be at home in this great understanding of the world, our times, our culture, and eternal, infinite Love. *Non erigitur vir nisi per feminam!* Can you feel that if you hold onto this approach you will have norms by which to evaluate and judge yourselves, even with regard to the smallest and most insignificant matters? Especially

¹⁴ Literally: Being in oneself. At the time of the Council and the years that followed, in which so much changed radically in the Church, Fr Kentenich emphasized that he wanted Schoenstatt to reflect on its own sources – especially because Schoenstatt had anticipated the developments of the Council. He did not want Schoenstatt to enter in a one-sided way into dialogue with the world, nor did he want it to look out of the corner of its eye at all that seemed so modern in the Church, because it had first to be examined for its staying power in the teaching and life of the Church.

¹⁵ Cf. Gal. 2,20.

¹⁶ Cf. Phil 3,20 – usually translated as: our conversation is in heaven, but it does not give the German text accurately, or reflect Fr Kentenich’s teaching: Just as people in the colonies took their bearings from the mother country, so we should take our bearings from the way of life in heaven.

today when everything is being shaken you won't so easily say: He or she is doing this or that, why can't I also do it? Who can I still trust or believe today?

3. *Non erigitur vir nisi per feminam!* Allow me to interpret these words in another way. Without the feminine element, unless the feminine character is cultivated also in man's soul, man cannot be redeemed. We have often said that the difference between man and woman, between a masculine and feminine soul, is not as great as people often think or presuppose. We know that in itself the soul is sexless. If this is really true, if the soul only takes on sexual qualities when it informs the body of a man or woman, the souls of men and women must have a lot in common. What do the souls of men and women have in common? It is a feminine disposition. If man's soul did not have a feminine disposition, it would be impossible to understand celibacy or virginity in a man. We as priests have to make an effort to discover this complementation through the feminine disposition in ourselves. Of course, you are right in saying that to some extent the same applies to the masculine qualities in a woman's soul. Without doubt! These are all tremendous goals for self-education and for saving the culture of today.

Non erigitur vir ... Without going into a lengthy philosophical discourse let me say that I will not be redeemed – if I may use the expression – from my inarticulate troglodite¹⁷ state, unless the feminine element in my soul is correspondingly developed. We will return to this immediately when we look more deeply into the metaphysics of woman from all angles. What does that mean? The “*volo*”¹⁸ has to be complemented by the “*fiat*”. The *fiat* attitude, the attitude of childlikeness, has to be cultivated. Also man will not be redeemed unless the child in him is awakened. I can call it this or that, it is always an auxiliary concept for what we are looking for. We must only know what is meant. So those words also apply to man: “Unless you become like a little child.” It isn't said only for woman. Unless we all experience that we have become children in a new way, we will not experience that the new person will come into existence; the new man will not come into existence, the new woman will not come into existence.

When you see these things described in this way, what seem to be small and insignificant questions, about which one is inclined to smile, take on a tremendous significance, for example, how I dress, my hairstyle, my manners ... We should always try to see the smallest things in a large context. If we manage to do this, the smallest will become the greatest, and what seems to be so great is often the smallest.

¹⁷ As in “cave man.” Reference to a certain characteristic of men to become uncultivated, crude, or even brutal unless there is an adequate feminine influence in their lives.

¹⁸ I will.