



51. The Eternal in Woman

Within the framework of the 1931 Pedagogical Congress (Cf. introduction to Text 49), Fr Kentenich, again dealt with the question of the nature of woman, and characterised it as “Magdtum” – being a handmaid. So it is quite possible that some readers won’t like the following text, especially if they are women, because the feeling today, as well as public opinion, emphasise very different things. This is so much the case that the editors were strongly tempted not to include this text in the anthology. However it would have been disloyal to our founder, because precisely in our times, when values have been lost and displaced, his aim was to look at the essential nature of human beings, and, if necessary, preserve it.

So, when reading this text readers are asked to consider the following points-of-view and aims of our founder:

- 1. The basis for what Fr Kentenich said, and his aim, is to bring out the fact that women are of equal value and equal ranking with men, and enjoy equality before the law. By “handmaid” he did not mean that woman has to wait upon man. Woman has had to emancipate herself from this idea. Woman is the “handmaid of the Lord”, and by adopting this fundamental attitude arrives at a sound autonomy and independence from man.*
- 2. The typical and essential qualities of woman – handmaid, service and self-surrender – are ultimately founded on God. They are qualities in God, so woman is an outstanding image and likeness of God.*
- 3. The remedy for what is pathological in our times is to be found in feminine values. This means that woman – and in particular the Blessed Mother as the highest expression of womanhood – has a special mission for our times. Our times have become ill through “virilism”, that is, society’s over-emphasis on masculine qualities. The “doer”, who believes in unlimited and hence arbitrary freedom, who thinks he can experiment with everything and mould it as he sees fit, needs to acquire the qualities of service and reverence for God, human beings and things, if he is to be healed and complemented. (Cf. Text 46)*

This text has been taken from “Ethos und Ideal in der Erziehung” – Ethos and Ideals in Education, Vallendar-Schoenstatt 1972, 131-153.

A teaching on the general principles of a modern asceticism for youth has to be grouped around three concepts: firstly, policy; secondly, tactics; thirdly, consistency.

These can apply in two ways: to the educator and to the person being educated. In the educator it is called motherliness, in the person being educated it is the ideal, either the personal or community ideal.

So to start with we wanted to deal with the large subject of the educator. What we have worked through in this regard has been dealt with until now more on a scientific⁵⁸ level in the general discussion with reference to man's leadership, and man as leader, but it can easily be applied to us women as educators.⁵⁹ So all that we have discussed can be grouped around the one idea: true priestly motherliness as the outflow of profound leadership.

Motherliness in the Light and Struggle of our Times

We don't want to borrow from the leadership of men this time, but try to shed light on genuine and profound motherliness by basing ourselves on ultimate principles.

Perhaps you haven't even noticed how motherliness has also been drawn into the public conflict of opinions today. You can infer this already from the fact that we find ourselves on the threshold of a powerful cultural change, which also affects the structure of woman's soul.⁶⁰

Now that woman has been torn out of her usual domain and tossed into public life, now that she has to enter into the struggle for survival, it follows naturally that people are reflecting on the intrinsic character of man and woman. This is because in the battle for survival woman encounters man as her opponent in this struggle. It is not just an outward struggle; it is also spiritual and intellectual. The relationship of man and woman has to be re-examined and again traced back to ultimate principles. It is here, in the conflict of opinions, that we hear expressions that people reject: On the one hand, "*Magdtum*", or handmaid, and on the other, "*Herrentum*", or the overlordship of man. A sensitive offshoot is the reflection: Why is woman not able to be ordained a priest like man? Why is that? Also this question is based on the battles surrounding the ultimate and deepest nature of man and woman. So also here, true motherliness, the true spirit of a handmaid, as the fundamental attitude of soul in the battles of our times.

Now let us present briefly what seems to me to be the right thing in this regard. It is the outflow of profound reverence for the genuine and true nature of woman. I shall only attempt to offer a solution which highlights your essential nature very strongly, and enthrones it. What is often rejected in your own ranks as the ultimate, essential nature of woman is the greatest and most beautiful quality God has built into and included in woman's nature, as a reflection of his own essential nature. You can be sure that the Triune God has embodied one of his most beautiful rays in woman's nature.

⁵⁸ *Wissenschaftlich* – as used by Fr Kentenich, refers to objective, principled and holistic thinking.

⁵⁹ The subject was discussed with reference to the work of J.J. Bachofen, *The Matriarchate* (1861). According to him our culture finds itself on the threshold of a turn from patriarchalism to a matriarchate. In 1931 Fr Kentenich commented upon a book by O. Eberz on, "*The Rise and Fall of a Masculine Age – Thoughts on Humanity as Composed of Two Sexes*".

⁶⁰ Cf. Pelagia Hagenhoff, *The Educational Philosophy of Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster*, 1946.

We have already heard various versions of that saying, "The eternal feminine beckons us on!"⁶¹ You know how these words are misinterpreted and how the eternal feminine is depicted as sensuality, as what is passionate, that entices man. You may not understand those words in this way. The eternal feminine is the eternal in woman. And the eternal in woman always attracts, it always uplifts. The eternal in woman is what I have called the most beautiful ray God has embodied of himself in your nature.

Of course, we may not overlook that there is not just something eternal, but also something demonic, in womanhood. If we are honest, we have to admit that the same can be said of man's nature. Also there we find something eternal and something demonic. Our task consists in increasingly overcoming the demonic in ourselves, and securing what is eternal and divine, and bringing it to its full maturity in ourselves. That is the meaning of the education of women, including our own education, if we really want to be great educators.

This eternal in woman has been the foundation of a matriarchate in every era. If you are somewhat at home in the modern women's movement, you will know such sayings as these: Woman, like the proletariat, is the prisoner of history; it is the task of our present era to free both prisoners and break their chains. If until now we have had a patriarchate, the time must come when we talk about a matriarchate, the dominance of true motherliness. The waves of the eternal in womanhood have to break over the whole culture so that motherliness governs and sets the tone for an entire cultural epoch.

Please listen carefully to what I have said: The eternal in woman has established such a matriarchate at all times, and, at least in all Christian eras, it has always reigned to an outstanding extent; it has governed public life as well as the private lives of the people.

So what is the eternal in woman? It is what we have called priestly motherliness.

The eternal in woman can be found most perfectly embodied in the greatest member of our race, the Blessed Mother. In her the demonic has withdrawn totally; only the eternal is at work. So, as members of her sex we want to bow down in profound reverence before the eternal in woman. If the eternal in our womanhood is to be developed, where can we find a better means than sensitive and personal bonding with the "blessed among women"?

Do you know how the Blessed Mother proclaimed and jubilantly sang out this eternal element in eternally valid terms? "*Ecce ancilla Domini. Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*".⁶² There you have the great theme for us leaders; but it is also a theme that has to be drawn upon in the education of women.

Do you know who prompted this "Behold the handmaid of the Lord"?

Please envisage the tremendous Annunciation scene. The Archangel stands before the "blessed among women" on behalf of the Triune God. He and the whole of heaven, the Triune God, bow before the eternal in womanhood. That is why the Blessed Mother answered, "*Ecce ancilla domini. Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*." When we look at the image of the Blessed Mother, don't we want increasingly to replicate these features of the eternal in woman in ourselves, and increasingly set out on pilgrimage towards these features?

⁶¹ Final lines of Goethe: *Faust*, Part Two, Act V. Translated by Martin Greenberg, Yale University Press 1998.

⁶² Lk 1,38, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word."

It is possible to formulate what the Blessed Mother has said to us in her memorable words – although put in more modern terms – as the expression of being a simple, divinised and strong handmaid. There you have the eternal in woman.

In these days we are striving to become what God has foreseen for us from all eternity. We not only want to strive in this way on our own account, or on God's account, but also on account of those God has entrusted to us, or will one day entrust to us. To the extent that we fully develop this eternal quality in ourselves, we will be able to educate others and bond them inwardly to ourselves.

To go into details, we can distinguish between the eternal in woman's humanity and the eternal in woman's religious nature.

However, you may not lose sight of the whole context. What we are discussing together is nothing more than constantly centering on the one great idea, "priestly motherliness". This is because this priestly motherliness is the sun of the eternal in womanhood.

Following our way of meditation, let us first of all look at woman's nature in a purely natural sense, while setting aside the specifically feminine forms of humanity's religious nature.

There is no doubt that there is also something eternal in woman's religious nature. Indeed, it is something that is really great. We may even say that unless man appropriates this eternal quality in woman's humanity and religious nature, he will remain incomplete. He needs to appropriate this eternal element in womanhood. This applies to priests, married men, all men, including young men.

[The eternal in womanhood]

Let me put it very simply: *Ecce ancilla*. That is the spirit of a simple and strong handmaid. I deliberately replaced the word "motherliness" with "handmaid". It sounds more down-to-earth and vigorous. Today motherliness has become a slogan. People try today to hide all that is mysterious and enigmatic behind the concept "motherliness". So it is probably better from time to time to replace "motherliness" with the clear concept "*handmaid*". This is how the Blessed Mother described herself.

[A simple, strong handmaid]

I would like you to understand the concept "simple" as an expression of all that we will later single out in woman's nature as being rooted in nature; or all that I have otherwise described as simple, childlike naïveté. It is this quality of integrity, purity and virginity.

A strong handmaid! To be a handmaid is always something strong. It includes selfless readiness to serve.

This sketches in the eternal qualities in woman's humanity.

We know that the present-day women's movement is up in arms against this fundamental attitude.

If we want to analyse and trace back the eternal in woman's humanity to ultimate principles, we can see that being a quiet and strong handmaid is a reflection of the eternal motherliness in Almighty God. Please try to trace this ray of the essential image of woman back to the Triune God.

God's eternal motherliness, God's eternal being a handmaid, is the ideal for us of being a handmaid.

Our present-day women's movement – both inside and outside the Catholic Church – is in danger of undermining this essential element, or moving it into the background. Of course, with regard to the Catholic women's movement, their motives are extremely noble.

In public life woman is struggling for equality with man. In the process, equality in value is too easily confused with equality in nature. We have also to admit that inarticulate masculinity has often become proud and rigid dominance to the detriment of woman's readiness to serve, her strong spirit of being a handmaid. There is an essential difference between understanding the ideal of being a quiet and strong handmaid as calm and selfless service, and seeing woman as only there to be the plaything, the slave of man. Woman is quite justified in defending herself against the latter. The only thing is that she may not, in the words of the saying, "throw the child out with the bathwater".

Attempts are being made in our culture to bring about an ontological revolution, as well as a revolution in activity.

An ontological revolution will never attain its goal. An ontological revolution is a rebellion against the eternal in humanity. This eternal element is as eternal as God, because it is a reflection of God. If the women's movement wants to bury the deepest essential nature of woman, if it wants to eradicate this strong and quiet spirit of a handmaid from woman's essential nature, we can be sure that it will be condemned to uselessness. It would be attempting to bring about an ontological revolution.

A revolution in activity – these attempts will always be made. We could, for example, consider the degree and extent to which the spirit of service has to be employed out of consideration for a culture. Such considerations are always appropriate.

If you want to see the ultimate reality, please meditate on the life of the Blessed Mother. Please do it! Perhaps you are looking for material for your meditation tomorrow. Consider for a moment: How did the Blessed Mother express the quiet and strong spirit of a handmaid in her life? What did she say? How did her life reflect what she had said? *Ecce ancilla Domini. Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*

Where can we find the eternal in our pastoral work? In the quiet and strong spirit of a handmaid. Unless the spirit of proud and harsh dominance is mitigated, education is absolutely impossible. This is because someone can be a rabble rouser, but true leadership is unthinkable without the eternal in woman's nature, that is, without this selfless spirit of a handmaid.

Everything the Triune God does, his creative activity, his redemptive activity, his healing activity, is only an expression of a tremendous and selfless spirit of service. God created us in order to serve us. He sustains us in our being, in the way we are. Why? In order to serve us. God governs and leads the world; he guides the small and great destiny of the world and human beings. Why? There is always the same spirit: the eternal in womanhood, a quiet and strong spirit of service.

In what does the essence of our Lord's representative activity as redeemer consist? Our Lord incorporates us into himself; he wants to redeem us. What are we dealing with here? Again this quiet and strong sense of service in the incarnate Son of God.

There is simply no way round it: If someone, including a man, wants to work fruitfully, he has to appropriate the eternal element in womanhood. St Paul said, "I want to become everything to everyone".⁶³ Our Lord washed his disciples' feet.⁶⁴ You see, the eternal in womanhood always shines out. This provides you with an explanation of the one thought: The whole tendency of our lives has to be priestly motherliness, or the quiet and strong spirit of a handmaid. Only where such an unseen, quiet and strong spirit of service is at work, is it possible for someone we are educating to bond with us personally, so that we can lead them onwards to the Triune God according to the laws of bonding.

However, if you want to delineate the whole complex of thoughts and values to some extent, you will have to consider this eternal quality of womanhood in your own being, as well as the eternal in woman's mission.

Womanhood has been given the mission to redeem man and his mission in order to redeem the culture of today. From this you can conclude that to the extent that we develop the eternal in ourselves, we have carried out the greatest apostolate we possibly can.

A mission to redeem man

Please note carefully that I am following a middle path in the controversies of our present times. I am not saying that woman has been born to be attached to a man. This is the tremendous breakthrough that took place through the Blessed Mother. She did not say: *Ecce ancilla viri*, I am the handmaid of man, but, *Ecce ancilla Domini*. Accordingly, in the ultimate roots of her being woman is not bonded to man, at least she is not necessarily bonded to man. However, she needs the spirit of being a handmaid. And that is where her greatness lies: The Blessed Mother was not bonded to a man.⁶⁵ She transferred being a handmaid directly to God. This characterises motherliness not just as physical, but essentially as spiritual motherliness. This spiritual motherliness is the metaphysical, the absolute quality in woman's humanity. As the great prophetess, the Blessed Mother introduced a movement of virginity into the centuries and millennia. Thanks be to God! That should be our pride: We are not absolutely dependent on man. The deepest roots of our being are to be found in the drive to serve. However, this does not have to find expression directly in relation to man.

To put it even more clearly, even if this still and strong spirit of a handmaid is concentrated on man in marriage, we may not confuse the word "service" with "wait upon". There is a big difference between serving someone or waiting upon him. It is not the victory of genuine womanhood if it easily degenerates into slavery, so that woman is described either as the slave of man, or his pretty plaything. We have to see things and show things very clearly today, especially when the deepest and ultimate nature of woman is at stake.

As women we have to be proud to be the way we are. We don't want to copy masculine ways, but live according to our nature. God has created us this way, because he has embodied a ray of his being in us.

This is just the dangerous tendency today: Because she is treated as inferior, woman either tries to become more masculine, or she allows her feminine allure full play. This only happens because we

⁶³ Cf. 1 Cor 9,22 and 10,33.

⁶⁴ Cf. Jn 13, 1-11.

⁶⁵ Cf. Lk 1,34.

women do not have a strong sense of our mission and status, we lack a strong sense of the dignity of our sex. Once you have understood these thoughts in their ultimate context, and apply them to your own self-education, and the formation and education of girls and young women, you will see how you will promote a sound and holy pride in your womanhood, which will have an extremely redemptive effect on the precarious situation of our culture.

I said that the eternal in woman has a double mission: first of all, to redeem man. What am I trying to say? You redeem man through your being, through what you are, not through attaching yourself directly to a man.

Rootedness and mobility

In the course of the centuries two elements have made history: the one is rootedness and the other is mobility. The tension between these two elements has in essentials created history in every age. Where can you find rootedness and mobility exemplified? Rootedness is exemplified in woman's nature, and mobility in man's nature. If you would like to use an image, woman's nature can be represented by a circle that constantly turns on its axis. Man's nature is exemplified in a straight line that aims into eternity. To put it another way: woman exemplifies the soul, man the intellect. This gives us the essential nature and mission of woman, of the eternal in womanhood, towards man.

Perhaps I may express more clearly what we understand by this rootedness as the essential nature of woman. Perhaps it would be better to say – but you have to understand the expression correctly – this rootedness is attachment to nature with an “animal”⁶⁶ and spiritual component. This is where woman's greatness lies. Of course, it can also be her weakness, because the divine and demonic are often so close. This is the reason why man either looks upon woman as an “angel”, or as an object to satisfy his lusts. It depends on woman how she appears in public, whether the world sees her as spiritualised and rooted in nature, or as a lesser being who is driven by her instincts. At any rate, both “animal” and spiritualised rootedness in nature are essential characteristics of woman.

It is extremely attractive to see how a true woman is attached to a place and to people. It is a really great quality. There you have a circular movement. A circle revolves constantly around the same central point. It is a reflection of the eternally circulating love within the Triune God. The love between Father and Son is so great that it gives rise to another Person, the Holy Spirit.

From this it becomes clear how Bolshevism actually creates dehumanised people when it deprives woman of the family, the hearth and personal possessions. Satan is at work in this, because the ultimate and deepest qualities in woman's nature are damaged or removed. Vice versa, how hard we have to work to oppose this dehumanisation by taking this “animal” attachment to nature seriously.

There was once a time when I could not understand why Sisters became ill when they were transferred. Years ago, when decrees were issued by Rome that superiors could only remain for a limited number of years at the same place and in the same office – until then it could be twenty or

⁶⁶ By “animal” is meant the instinctive, spontaneous, emotional attachment that precedes the reflected, conscious and willed attachment.

twenty-five years – I could not understand why so many superiors died as a result of being deprived of their office. Why? Because it touched upon the personal core of woman's nature – her "animal" attachment to nature.

I have now described woman's feeling of being at home, but also woman's mission towards man.

Now you may not think that woman's attachment to nature is a purely animal quality. It is also spiritual. Once woman has understood a spiritual truth, she attaches herself to it with every fibre of her being. When she has sublimated her humanity in religion, when her nature has taken hold of God with every fibre of her being, you will find the same sound and passionate self-surrender to God and Christ. Then an idea, the beloved Person, comes alive in her, and woman attaches herself with every fibre of her being to that Person.

If you want to illustrate the climax of this love, look up to the Woman under the Cross. Can you see the strength behind it? The men run away, but the woman is attached to the person. She would be ready to throw away her life for the person she loves.

What about man's nature? The essential nature of man is to be found not in intellectual rootedness – that would put it too strongly – but in intellectual mobility. A true man is moved by the intellect. That is why he is called the vagabond of life who is constantly on the move. He has to be given a home by the eternal in woman's nature.

Now the eternal in woman is not just embodied in woman's nature, but also in man's nature. I am generalising. There are men who are more feminine than masculine, and there are women who are more masculine than feminine. You know the expressions: girlish boys and boyish girls. So you have to try to find out what traits are more developed in you. This is because, if we want to educate, form and understand ourselves in the light of the original image of the Triune God, we have to be on the look out in this regard to see how the animal and the intellectual attachment to nature have been developed in us. This is how we redeem man from his one-sided character. The eternal in woman has to redeem and resolve man's tendency to be moved by time, and the eternal in man has to redeem and resolve woman's tendency to be bonded to time.

Can you feel from what has been said what task and mission we have been given by what we are? At the same time we also have before us our educational method based on our being.

So what do we want to do?

[Imbue with heart and soul]

By nature woman is the element that imbues everything with heart and soul; by nature man is the element moved by the intellect, and that drives everything forward. Unless the two are together, there can be no cultural progress. So what does man have to assimilate from the eternal in woman? This ability to imbue everything with heart and soul, or, if you want to put it more simply, this ability to love personally. That is so essential. A woman who by nature only advocates ideas is no more than a ringleader. A genuine leader has always to embody both qualities in a variety of combinations. But both qualities have to be present simultaneously: to serve a great idea, and personal love for our followers. You can also see this in the Triune God, in the God-Man Jesus Christ, as well as in all the great apostles and saints. Unless this personal and heartfelt love is present, you can be a ringleader, but no personal relationship will develop. So we also have to strive to attain a heartfelt, personal relationship and love for the people we are leading.

Can you discern from what has been said how great the eternal quality in human nature is? Isn't it worth our effort and toil to develop this eternal quality in woman's nature increasingly? It is precisely here that we discover the whole greatness of our task to save this eternal quality in woman for a new cultural epoch. The reason why there is so much chaos in the world is because the eternal in woman is not acknowledged. Our entire educational work with women must ultimately be directed towards saving woman's nature for a new epoch.

Actually a woman's sound instincts should immediately be able to grasp things correctly. However, we have become so dreadfully insecure, because our whole culture has cast off everything as a result of the new circumstances we are confronting. This is the cause of the tremendous uncertainty. It shows us how great our task is as educators of women and girls. If we manage to educate only a single girl to become a genuine woman, we will have brought about a tremendous cultural deed. You can be sure that the devil knows what he is doing when he allows socialism and bolshevism to trample upon the eternal in womanhood.

This does not mean that we as women have to be attached to a man. By no means! But if I am married, this characteristic quality of reverent service and heartfelt love has to be preserved. If both sink down to the level of the instincts, the eternal in woman will have become demonic.

In this context please try to sense how this eternal quality in womanhood – it doesn't matter whether a woman is personally attached to her husband, or whether it has been developed in a general sense – always presupposes tremendous loneliness in woman: loneliness in God and with God. Of course, this already brings us to the subject of woman's religious nature.

[Woman's mission for a culture]

I have spoken about woman's mission to redeem man, and now I want to add something about the mission of the eternal in womanhood as the redemptive work of woman within a culture.

Our present-day culture has lost its soul. If you understand and value the saying, "If a woman is at work, she has to be the soul!" you will sense how woman has been given an irreplaceable task. That is her great mission.

However, in this regard we must unfortunately note that because woman wants to represent a masculine type, because she strives to become masculine, she is constantly dragging our present-day culture downwards. As a result she is co-operating in dehumanising our present-day humanity and culture.

Again we have to apply the great method in this field: Don't just govern and lead, but serve reverently, invest your love, be the soul everywhere, even when we have to broadcast great ideas. That is the ideal of the educator and leader, whether man or woman.

Have you ever consciously noticed what great qualities have been invested in your nature? Let us learn to be proud of ourselves, and to teach this pride to those entrusted to our care!

[Application to the Blessed Mother]

You will find everything I have said in principle embodied in the Blessed Mother. She is our Mother. So she not only employed the quiet and strong spirit of a handmaid towards her only begotten Child, but also towards us. We are the object of her quiet and strong spirit of service. She is our priestly Mother. Look at how reverently she has served our life, our life's task! Please try to discover how she has loved us with heartfelt love. Look at how she loves us warmly still today! She

is all-powerful with her supplication. Look at how she imbues with heart and soul all that our great God has placed in us!

When you meditate on these thoughts, you will see how mysteriously the finest fibres of your soul will connect and unite themselves with the blessed of your sex. How wrong it is if we women and educators think: Don't have too much devotion to Mary, otherwise our Lord will recede into the background! That is wrong. If you do without the Blessed Mother, you give up what will create the eternal in woman's nature. If you give up the Blessed Mother, I ask you how you are going to restore the strong awareness of true womanly greatness to the women of today? If you want to connect the Blessed Mother with our Lord, you will find in her the feminine embodiment of the image of our Lord. Whoever knows life today and leads a religious life, will not find a dichotomy here. They will not be so stupid as to say: As a result of the differentiation between the sexes, we want to leave Marian devotion to men. That is absolutely wrong. Also we women have to be proud, and know no rest until we have acquired an extraordinarily great love for the Blessed Mother.

In the Blessed Mother we find the example of genuine and true motherliness. So we learn from her. We are the object of this genuine motherliness, and we are proud of it. So we want to make use of our few days in Schoenstatt to feel that we are children who belong to the Blessed Mother. We want to tell her: If what we have heard is true, how sheltered we feel in you! Notice the great advantage of childlike attachment to a genuine mother. We then see the whole world through the personality of the Blessed Mother. Ultimately we will also see our whole need to be sheltered satisfied for all time in her, the "blessed among women", in her, the strong woman.

Now, please don't forget to pray for the grace to understand all these great truths. It is already valuable to see these thoughts in the context I have mentioned, but it is all the more valuable if we are allowed to take up the work of chiselling the eternal out of woman's nature today.