

Chapter VII

The Significance of Woman's Intrinsic Value in National Life

Honored guests, dear colleagues!
Please let me begin with a short personal observation. Two days ago, I traveled from Beuron, where I was permitted to spend Holy Week and Easter Sunday, to Ludwigshafen into the midst of preparation for the convention. One can hardly imagine a greater contrast: there, the quiet valley of peace where, unconcerned with everything that happens abroad in the world, praise to the Lord is sung day after day, year after year—a *custodia matutina usque ad noctem*¹ and this assembly which has gathered to speak of burning contemporary questions.

This was almost like dropping from heaven to earth.² But perhaps this contrast is a direct symbol of the problem which we all have. Within the last week, we have all gone the way of the cross with our Savior; all our hearts still exult in the paschal "Alleluia." And in a week we must return to our ordinary duties. But the efficacy of the Passion and Easter should not be an incidental holiday disposition dissipated by ordinary life; on the contrary, it is a living power of God within us which we interweave into our professional life. And this convention ought to help us to do so.

Now to the topic. For me, this topic in its precise working indicates how much the image of the feminist movement has changed recently. Even twenty years ago, it would have scarcely occurred to anyone to pose such a question. The big slogan in the beginning of the feminist movement was *Emancipation*. That sounds rather lofty and revolutionary: liberation from the chains of slavery.

The demands were more practical: removal of the fetters which prevented women from entering into the same educational and professional activities *as men*. Woman's personal capabilities and powers, often dwarfed without these opportunities for action, were to be liberated. Hence the goal was one of *individualism*. Outside the extreme left, this demand met lively resistance. "Woman's place is in the home!" resounded from every side. It was feared that granting women's demands would jeopardize feminine singularity and woman's natural calling. On the other hand, these opponents maintained that woman was not qualified for *masculine* professions because of her singularity. The Suffragettes violently opposed this view; and, in the heat of battle, they went so far as to *deny* completely the feminine *singularity*—that women were any different from men. Consequently, one could not speak of an intrinsic *feminine value*. (As a matter of fact, their only goal was to insist that women were equal to men in all fields.)

The Weimar Constitution recognized women's claims to such a degree that the most audacious pioneers of the feminist movement would not have believed it possible for it to take place so soon. And with that a change commenced. The heat of battle cooled. One was again capable of judging calmly and clearly. Besides, today we can speak from years of experience concerning the future of the professional woman; whereas earlier, the arguments of both factions were *a priori* judgments, if not completely arbitrary ones. So the contemporary situation is characterized primarily by feminine *singularity* being accepted as *self-evident*. We women have become aware once again of our singularity. Many a woman who formerly denied it has perhaps become aware of it, painfully aware of it, if she has entered one of the traditionally masculine professions and sees herself forced into conditions of life and work alien to her nature. If her *nature* is strong enough, she has perhaps succeeded in converting the *masculine* profession into a *feminine* one. And this *self-awareness* could also develop the conviction that an *intrinsic feminine value* resides in the singularity.

And finally, a contemporary trend became decisive for the acceptance of feminine singularity also. The individualistic disposition

of the nineteenth century has yielded more and more to a social disposition. Today, that which is to be of value must be made fruitful for the community. And our theme upholds that this possibility also exists for the intrinsic value of woman.

The first task now is to sketch briefly the *singularity* of women, for it is indeed only by doing this that the intrinsic value can be made comprehensible. During the last few decades, psychology has been much occupied with the psychical differences between the sexes; certainly, experiment and statistics have not revealed much more than what ordinary experience already teaches. I would like to emphasize only two criteria differentiating man from woman from those which are usually mentioned, since they have particular significance in helping us understand the intrinsic value of woman.

1. Man appears more *objective*: it is natural for him to dedicate his faculties to a discipline (be it mathematics or technology, a trade or business management) and thereby to subject himself to the precepts of this *discipline*. *Woman's attitude is personal*; and this has several meanings: in one instance she is happily involved with her total being in what she does; then, she has particular interest for the living, concrete person, and, indeed, as much for her own personal life and personal affairs as for those of other persons.

2. Through submission to a discipline, man easily experiences a *one-sided development*. In woman, there lives a natural drive towards *totality* and *self-containment*. And, again, this drive has a twofold direction: she herself would like to become a *complete human being*, one who is fully developed in every way; and she would like to help others to become so, and by all means, she would like to do justice to the complete human being whenever she has to deal with persons.

Both of these characteristic impulses as they *emerge from nature* do not demonstrate yet any initial value; indeed, they can be harmful. But, correctly handled, they can become most valuable. Let us clarify the *value of the personal attitude and the tendency to completeness*, and then consider how this value can be developed from the raw material.

The personal attitude is objectively justified and valuable because actually the human person is more precious than all objective values. All truth is discerned by persons; all beauty is beheld and measured by persons. All objective values exist in this sense for persons. And behind all things of value to be found in the world stands the *person of the Creator* who, as prefigurement, encloses all earthly values in Himself and transmits them. In the area of our common experience, the human being is the highest among creation since his personality is created in the image of God. It is the *whole person* about whom we are speaking: *that* human being in whom God's image is developed most purely, in whom the gifts which the Creator has bestowed do not wither but bloom, and in whom the faculties are balanced in conformity to God's image and God's will—the will led by intellect, and the lower faculties bridled by intellect and will.

Each human being is called naturally to this total humanity, and the desire for it lives in each one of us. We may consider that the drive for this which is particularly strong in woman is well related to her particular destiny of companion and mother. *To be a companion*, that means to be support and mainstay, and to be able to be so, a woman herself must stand firmly; however, this is possible only if inwardly everything is in right order and rests in equilibrium. *To be a mother* is to nourish and protect true humanity and bring it to development. But again, this necessitates that she possess true humanity herself, and that she is clear as to what it means; otherwise, she cannot lead others to it. One can become suitable for this double duty if one has the *correct personal attitude*. As we have already stated, woman does not possess this by nature. The initial form of feminine singularity is primarily a debasement and blockage of this true attitude. On the one hand, it is a bias *to secure her own personal importance* by which she may busy herself and others; also, it is an inability to endure criticism which is experienced as an attack on her person. These yearnings for importance, yearnings towards unlimited recognition, are extended to everything unique to the person. Her own husband must be recognized as the very best husband, her own children must be known as the most beautiful,

clever, and gifted. This is blind feminine love which dulls realistic judgment and renders her completely unsuitable for the designated feminine vocation. Along with this excessive vindication of her own person goes an *excessive interest in others*, a perverse desire to penetrate into personal lives, a passion of wanting to confiscate people. Excess of interest in both her own and in the stranger's personality merge in feminine surrender, the urge to lose herself completely in a human being; but in so doing, she does justice neither to self nor to the humanity of another, and, at the same time, becomes unfit for exercising other duties.

Also connected to the false pursuit of prestige is a perverted desire for totality and inclusiveness, a mania to know everything and thereby to skim the surface of everything and to plunge deeply into nothing. However, such superficiality can never be true humanity. Whoever controls a matter thoroughly stands closer to true humanity than he who never stands on firm ground. Among those who have a thoroughly objective formation, there are certainly more men than women. However, in the *small flock* that approaches the goal of full humanity there seem to be more women than men.

How is it then possible to extricate the purified valuable feminine character from the raw material of feminine singularity with all its faults and weaknesses, of which, as daughters of Eve, we all have a share?

In the first instance, a good natural method for this is *thoroughly objective work*. Every such work, no matter of what kind, whether housework, a trade, science or anything else, necessitates submitting to the laws of the matter concerned; the whole person, thoughts just as all moods and dispositions, must be made subordinate to the work. And whoever has learned this, has become *objective*, has lost something of the *hyper-individuality* and has attained a definite freedom of self; at the same time she has attained an inner depth—she has attained a basis of self-control. Indeed, every young girl should receive a basic vocational formation for the sake of these great personal gains, quite aside from any economic compulsion; and after this formation, she should hold a position which completely fulfills her. No other environment than the life of the *high*

school girl of the old style and that of the unoccupied woman from affluent circles provides a more fertile soil for the debasement of the feminine singularity and for hysteria, its sickly enhancement. Because objective work, which we view as a remedy for the faults of feminine singularity, is something to which the average man is naturally inclined, it can thus be said as well that an allowance of masculine nature is the antidote for the *hyper-feminine nature*. But with this, we in reality propose that, after all, the matter cannot rest there. It would be to attain thereby only an analogy to the masculine species, as, in fact, it frequently was in the beginning of the feminist movement; and that would be neither a greater gain for us or for others. We must advance further from the objective outlook to the proper personal one, which is also the attitude that is actually most highly objective. But relevant to this personal outlook is a realization of true humanity, i.e., of its ideal image, and a perception of the predispositions towards it as well as departures from it within ourselves and in others, a freedom of insight, an autonomy within ourselves and in others, and a power for enforcement of the needed practical precautions that cannot win at all by human means. No book learning can give this acuteness of vision to our blind sight, no straining of the will can provide the energy to clip the wild shoots within ourselves and in those people dear to us. Supernatural means must now come to our help.

To begin with, where do we have the concrete image of total humanity? God's image walked amongst us in human form, in the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. If we reflect on how this image speaks to us in the simple account of the gospels, it then opens our eyes. The better we get to know the Savior, the more we are conquered by His sublimity and gentleness, by His kingly freedom which knows no other obligation than submission to the Father's will, and by His freedom from all living creatures which is simultaneously the foundation for His compassionate love towards each living creature. And the deeper this image of God penetrates into us, the more it awakens our love. In just this way, we become the more sensitive to all falling away from Him in ourselves and in others; our eyes are opened, free of all extenuations, to true knowledge of human

nature. And if the power fails us to endure the sight of human weakness in ourselves and in others, only a look at the Savior is again needed; indeed, He has not turned from our misery with horror, but He came to us exactly because of this misery and took it upon Himself—*vere languores nostros ipse portavit et livore eius nos sanati sumus*. Thus He Himself has the remedy if we do not know where to find redress. Through His sacraments, He purifies and strengthens us. And if we turn confidently to Him, which is His will, His spirit penetrates us more and more and converts us; through union with Him, we learn to dispense with human props and to gain the freedom and strength which we must have in order to be the support and mainstay for others. He Himself guides us and shows us how we should guide others. We therefore achieve total humanity through Him and, simultaneously, the right personal attitude. Whoever looks to Him and is concentrated on Him sees God, the archetype of all personality and the embodiment of all value. The surrender to which feminine nature inclines is here appropriate; on the other hand, we also *find* here the absolute love and surrender for which we seek vainly in people. And surrender to Christ does not make us blind and deaf to the needs of others—on the contrary. We now seek for God's image in each human being and want, above all, to help each human being win his freedom. Accordingly, we can now also say: the *intrinsic value of woman* consists essentially in *exceptional receptivity for God's work in the soul*, and this value comes to unalloyed development if we abandon ourselves confidently and unresistingly to this work.

Only now have we come to the second part of our theme—the significance of woman for national life. This significance presents itself as a simple conclusion from what has been said. What is, then, the great sickness of our time and of our people? There is an inner disunion, a complete deficiency of set convictions and strong principles, an aimless drifting. Therefore, the great mass of humanity seeks for an anesthetic in ever new, ever more refined delights. Those who wish to maintain a sober level of life, in order to protect themselves from contemporary turmoil, frequently annihilate this level by one-sided professional work; but even they cannot do

anything to escape the turmoil. Only whole human beings as we have described them are immune to the contemporary sickness: such beings are steadfast on eternal first principles, unperturbed in their views and in their actions by the changing modes of thoughts, follies, and depravities surrounding them. Every such individual is like a pillar to which many can fasten themselves, thereby attaining a firm footing. Consequently, when women themselves are once again whole persons and when they help others to become so, they create healthy, energetic spores supplying healthy energy to the entire national body.

They are able to do this above all in their vocation as *mother*. These are mothers who have a firm philosophy of life, who know to *what purpose* they should rear their children, who have an open vision of the developmental possibilities of their children. But also they have an incorruptible perspective of the dangerous drives in them which must be curtailed and which must be seized with a powerful hand at the right moment. And these also must be mothers who know their place, who do not think that they are able to do everything themselves but, on the contrary, are able to let go of their children and place them in God's hand when the time comes, when the children have outgrown them. Such mothers are probably the most important agents for the recovery of the nation. Also, woman frequently has the duty to help all humanity towards victory in relation to her spouse. He generally has the need "to be an individual also" when he comes from his professional activity, but often he no longer has the strength to be able to do so on his own. The wife's concern must therefore be to take care that he does not look for compensation in shallow or dangerous diversions. A fine home creates an atmosphere in which the soul can freely breathe. And then the values which she longs for are materialized naturally. Tact and delicacy must discover what is to be settled at a given moment. Often the proper relationship between the father and children, which is of greatest significance for both parties, must above all be mediated by the mother. And in countless cases, it is the difficult, thorny duty of the woman to win back to the faith a husband who is indifferent to religion or who rejects it. This is a task of greatest

responsibility which only very few—even with proper good will—know how to handle in the right way. For here, in most cases, more is lost rather than gained by much talk or even with scolding. Even in apparently desperate cases, weapons which have led to victory are to go one's own quiet and unperturbed path (along with the greatest of all loving cooperation and civility), and, in self-surrender, to pray constantly. The battle is not always won, for here it is a question of God's mystery which we cannot penetrate.

Close to that of spouse and mother, the profession of *teacher* has always been valued as a truly feminine vocation. The teacher certainly has to shape mankind. And in our times in which the home breaks down so frequently, the future of our people depends more than ever on the teaching body. And with this comes a grave responsibility. Certainly, the school in many instances can no longer rectify the wrongs committed in the home. But it must try to do this by every means. And today, when we recognize at last that the primary school must be "the training school of our people," we may hope that by degrees this will also be accomplished in the high schools as well, and that the curricula will undergo the necessary reshaping and improvement in order to free forces for the educational task of the school. And what is efficacious for the mother is naturally efficacious for the educator as well, and in an enhanced degree. She must *be firm*: confusion in young heads and hearts is produced by wobbly and untested perspectives, by undigested and undigestible fruits of reading, a confusion which many times can be remedied no longer. And particularly when the teacher has to deal with older children, her theoretical basis must be well-grounded because she will meet interferences and objections which occur less frequently at home. The teacher thus needs a basic education in dogma and asceticism. Apologetics is certainly also good, but the former seems more important to me: ready arguments, as right as they may be, often do not have penetrating force. But she whose soul is formed through the truths of faith—and I call this ascetic formation—finds words which are proper for *this* human being and for *this* moment respectively.

And in one respect the teacher has it more difficult, for the natural bond of love which exists between mother and child from the beginning does not exist between her and the children. Love and trust are, however, necessary rudiments for every educational influence in depth. On the part of the teacher, this love and trust must be won by means of a nature which loves consistently. And truly supernatural forces are needed to offer such equal, motherly love to *all*, even to the unlovable, the difficult, the intolerable children—and especially to them because, indeed, they are in most need of it.

Woman's vocation as teacher has never been disputed. But even other professions, which were considered earlier as masculine monopolies, have changed through usage and have shown themselves in keeping with feminine individuality; these professions are so constituted that they can be mastered through truly feminine handling, in the right sense. I am thinking of the profession of the medical woman. I have made the gratifying observation that women who have once been in the care of a woman doctor do not willingly give themselves again to other treatment. It may be that a feeling of shame contributes to this fact. But I believe that something else is even more important. As a rule, the sick who visit or send for a doctor do not seek merely to have a particular organ healed of a particular trouble; one feels himself "out of line" in his entire system; one seeks healing for body and soul, and one also desires a friendly, comprehensive sympathy. This was to be found in the house doctor of the old school. But this beneficial service has become just about extinct, ousted through specialization. This development naturally cannot be revoked. Medical science has adopted such proportion that it is no longer actually possible to master fundamentally all its divisions. But in specialization it should not be forgotten that in most cases it is not only the organ but, on the contrary, it is the entire person who is sick along with the organ. Just as in the knowledge of the illness, so is it also not a matter of indifference as to what kind of person the doctor is facing in regard to the medical treatment. The symptoms are not exactly the same with each individual, and even much less can every remedy

be of value for each one. And, as we have said, it is, moreover, consideration of the whole being which approaches the spiritual needs of the sick person. As we have seen, such a regard lies in the nature of woman. And if she exercises her medical vocation in this manner, she can thus attain much more than healing the actual illness. She receives insight into diverse human situations; she necessarily gets to see material and moral need. This is a wide area for authentic feminine activity, and it signifies Christian charity at the same time.

We have arrived at the large range of social vocations which have in most part been formed only in recent years or are still in the process of formation. They all require womanly hands and, naturally, also women who are whole persons: the vocations of social worker, welfare worker for young people, nursery school teacher, administrator in a jail or factory, etc. Everywhere, the problem is to save, to heal endangered or demoralized humanity, to steer it into healthy ways. In order not to anticipate later papers, I do not want to examine these vocations more closely here. I do want to say only a few words on scholarly work for women because you perhaps expect something from me precisely on that subject. I believe that in reality there is less occasion here for the effect of feminine intrinsic value. Scholarship is the realm of the most austere objectivity. Hence, feminine singularity will only fructify where the subject deemed worthy of research is in a personal direction, i.e., in the humanities: history, literature, etc. Whoever chooses one of the abstract sciences—mathematics, natural sciences, pure philosophy, etc.—finds that as a rule, the masculine-intellectual type predominates in at least whatever is related to pure research. However, woman may perhaps assert her singularity anew in such areas of knowledge by the way she instructs; this is a helpful way which brings her into close relationship with people.

In addition, I would like to speak of the intrinsic value of woman in *political life*. In *legislation*, there is always danger that resolution "at the official level" will be based on the elaboration of the possibly most perfect paragraphs without their consideration of actual circumstances and consequences in practical life. Feminine

singularity resists this abstract proceeding; woman is suited to act in accordance with the concrete human circumstance, and so she is able to serve as redress here. She has also already proved herself as a blessed counterbalance against another deterioration of *masculine objectivity*. The intention of the politician's party is often the *object* which is of primary importance for him, one to which he has dedicated himself. And somehow, this can result in the highest unobjectivity by the manipulation of a bill's draft. Thus, years ago on the deliberation of youth laws, the danger did exist that the project would end in failure by party opposition. The women of the differing parties at that time worked together and reached an agreement. The authentic feminine longing to remedy human need was thus victorious over the dilemma of party viewpoint. Just as in legislation, feminine singularity can also work beneficially in the application of the law in *bureaucracy*, provided it does not lead to abstract validation of the letter of the law but to the accomplishment of justice for humanity.

Finally, woman's intrinsic value can work in every place and thereby institute grace, completely independent of the profession which she practices and whether it concurs with her singularity or not. Everywhere she meets with a human being, she will find opportunity to sustain, to counsel, to help. If the factory worker or the office employee would only pay attention to the spirits of the persons who work with her in the same room, she would prevail upon trouble-laden hearts to be opened to her through a friendly word, a sympathetic question; she will find out where the shoe is pinching and will be able to provide relief. Everywhere the need exists for maternal sympathy and help, and thus we are able to recapitulate in the *one word motherliness* that which we have developed as the characteristic value of woman. Only, the motherliness must be that which does not remain within the narrow circle of blood relations or of personal friends; but in accordance with the model of the Mother of Mercy, it must have its root in universal divine love for all who are there, belabored and burdened.

Thus I can summarize that a high vocation is designated in feminine singularity—that is, to bring true humanity in oneself and

in others to development. But hazardous germs also lie in feminine singularity which endanger the essential value in its development and thereby the realization of mission. The dangers can only be conquered through rigorous discipline in the school of work and through the liberating power of divine grace. Our mission is to become flexible instruments in God's hand and to effect His work to which He leads us. If we fulfill our mission, we do what is best for ourselves, for our immediate environment, and together with it, what is best for the entire nation.