4. Friend, sister and spouse

A fourth aspect of the feminine genius is woman's unique contribution to interpersonal relationships with men. Pope John Paul II writes: "Humany... can exist only as a 'unity of the two', and therefore a question here of a mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man." 24

In Genesis 2:18, Eve is described as "a helpmate for man." She was not created to be a nurse maid, servant or appendage to man, though this is a common misunderstanding of the text. She is a lively counter-weight and a helpful collaborator, a co-worker and partner in the "making and doing" which God calls forth in humanity.

The biblical notion of a "shared bone" means that man and woman are truly of the same "kin" -- they must respect each other's differences with the mutual and enriching love of mother and sister, not as alien competing forces or conquering powers.

Women as friends, sisters and colleagues of men give and receive what Pope John Paul II calls "co-education" in ways that are richer and also more challenging than occurs in same-sex friendships.

Dietrich von Hildebrand, a great Catholic philosopher of the person, speaks of the dynamic of male and female friendships. Because there is a deeply spiritual and personal difference between them, he says, "... a woman will never be as deeply understood by a woman as she could be understood by a man; a man will never be as deeply understood by a man as he could be by a woman." 25

There are numerous examples of the edifying and encouraging role of women. Pope John Paul writes: "The women whom Jesus met and who received so many graces from him, also accompanied him as he journeyed with the Apostles through the towns and villages, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God; and they 'provided for them out of their means'. The Gospel names Joanna, who was the wife of Herod's steward, Susanna and 'many others'" (cf. Lk 8:1-3).

Great reforms in the history of the Church have often come from the mutually invigorating vision and talents of holy man and woman friends, among them Santa Clara; Francis, Teresa of Avila and Jane of the Cross, Maxim and her brother Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, Mary MacKillop and Fr. Julian Tenison Woods, etc.

According to John Paul II, man and woman not only find themselves as companions but they also log "to go out of themselves" towards each other in the "spousal meaning of their bodies." 26

In marriage, women and men give themselves in a sexual love which is spousal and familial. In so doing, their "one flesh commandment" becomes a unique icon of the "family" that is the Blessed Trinity: "They are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life." 27

In her awareness of the need for support, mutuality, reliability and selfless love, a woman listens to her feminine genius and will not be prepared to give her whole self -- including her powers of service, fertility or feminine creativity -- until she finds a man who is prepared to engage in "co-education" for this great mission. Pope John Paul II writes: "It is the woman who bears directly for this shared generation, which liberates the energies of her body and soul. It is therefore necessary that the man be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes a special debt to the woman. No programme of 'equal rights' between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account." 28

Unfortunately, many women today are defied to their maternal and genital genius and do not demand sexual or maternal respect from men. They believe there is no inherent "meaning" to sexual relationships other than satisfaction, convenience and a fragile type of loving companionship in which pregnancy and fertility are problematic.

The new feminism is marked by a concern to re-value the place of the feminine genius for the home, marriage and the family, and the development of great leaders at every level of society.

4. Friend, sister and spouse

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Mary, model of the feminine genius

The fullness of the feminine genius is realised in the life of the Virgin Mary. Pope John Paul II writes: "In Mary, Eve discovers the nature of the true dignity of woman, of feminine humanity. This discovery must continually reach the heart of every woman and shape her vocation and her life." 29

Mary, in an outstanding and shining way, received her womanhood as a gift along with its transformation through God's redeeming grace in self-giving "spousal" and "maternal" intimacy with Christ.

Edith Stein, Edith Stein - Woman, Essays on Women, ICS 1996
Edith Stein, Essential Writings, Orbis 2002
Waltraud Herbeth, Edith Stein - A Biography, Ignatius 1982
Wendy Shaft, A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Last Virtue, Free Press 2000
Joan Carroll Cruz, Saints Women of Modern Times, OSV 2004
Pope John Paul II, Letter to Women, 25 June 1988
- Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem, 15 August 1988
All of these titles are available from the Mustard Seed Bookshop.

Questions for discussion
1. What struck you most about this article?
2. What do you think should be some characteristics of the "new feminism"?
3. Which of the four aspects of the feminine genius mentioned in this article do you think are especially important? Can you think of any others that are not mentioned?
4. Which women, from the past or the present, do you think especially embody the feminine genius?

Further Reading
Genevieve Kineke, The Authentic Catholic Woman, Servant Books 2006
Edith Stein, Edith Stein - Woman, Essays on Women, ICS 1996
Edith Stein, Essential Writings, Orbis 2002
Waltraud Herbeth, Edith Stein - A Biography, Ignatius 1982
Wendy Shaft, A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Last Virtue, Free Press 2000
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Women have distinctive qualities with which to enrich society, qualities Pope John Paul II called the "feminine genius." In this article Anna Krohn explores what makes up the "feminine genius" and how it can contribute to a better world.
The call for a new feminism

Most of us are familiar with popular phrases such as "The signs are certain..." or "Women's rights are human rights..." but have you ever really said to yourself how these phrases are related to each other? We have heard them often, but what is the rationale behind them? How are they connected to the concept of feminism as we know it today?

the role of women in society has changed over time. Traditionally, women were viewed as subordinate to men in terms of education, employment, and political participation. However, this has been changing in recent years with the rise of the feminist movement. Feminism is a social, political, and economic ideology that advocates for women's rights and equality. It seeks to challenge the systemic discrimination and oppression faced by women and promote their empowerment.

The history of feminism spans centuries, with early women's rights movements fighting for the right to vote and gain access to education and professional opportunities. The feminist movement has evolved over time, with different movements and ideologies emerging to address specific issues such as reproductive rights, sexual equality, and diversity.

This text explores the different perspectives and approaches within the feminist movement, highlighting the diversity of voices and experiences that make up the feminist movement today.

The role of men in the feminist movement cannot be overlooked. Men have also been involved in the movement, with many advocating for gender equality and working to end patriarchal structures. The movement is not just about women, but about everyone who supports the cause of equality.

The feminist movement is not just about individual actions, but about collective action and solidarity. It is a movement that seeks to end systemic oppression and promote a just society where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.

In conclusion, feminism is a complex and evolving ideology that seeks to challenge and change the oppressive structures that exist in society. It is a movement that is not just about women, but about everyone who supports the cause of equality and justice. The feminist movement continues to grow and evolve, with new voices and perspectives emerging to address the challenges of our time.