

# JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: November 2017

My Commentary on: "The Masculine Genius" - Dr. Deborah Savage, Franciscan University Presents: Published June 2016

Video Link → <https://www.faithandreason.com/2016/05/6342/>

## True Feminism, Part 6: The Masculine and Feminine Genius Continued

Last month, in my continuing commentary on true feminism, I summarized the main points of two papal letters, written by Saint John Paul 2, addressing womanhood and the special God-given charisms of women, coined the "feminine genius." I looked to answer two main questions: "What is the feminine genius?" and "How does the feminine genius impact the vocation of women?"

I do believe that in isolating the masculine or feminine genius there is a great temptation to pit men and women against each other, in a "Girls rule, boys drool," or vice versa, kind of outlook. However, men and women are not in competition with each other; we are complimentary! Thus it is important to look at the genius of both sexes and how they are related, so that as men and women we can come to know ourselves better, and help each other reach our greatest potential. I truly believe that if men and women work together, embracing our differences and these unique charisms (our masculine and feminine genius), our world will benefit immensely. As men and women, we can use this information to help make the world a better place to live.

It is for these reasons that I have chosen to highlight Dr. Deborah Savage's work in the area of the masculine genius. I have chosen a "Franciscan University Presents" interview with Dr. Savage for my resource-of-the-month. During this video presentation, she addresses and discusses the special God-given charisms of men and how these relate to the feminine genius.

Dr. Savage actually prefers to refer to the genius of men as his special 'charism,' and notes that what used to be natural for men and women is now so distorted (masculine and feminine identity) that we need to become reacquainted with these natural charisms of men and women. I tend to agree, as I have noticed a real crisis of identity present in our current culture. "Everything begins with self-knowledge," Dr. Savage wisely articulates.

So what is the masculine genius? It is important to note that while these traits may be special charisms held by men, this does not mean that women do not have these qualities too; it simply means that these are man's gift and that the way he embodies these traits is different than the way women do.

### **The Masculine Genius:**

Following in the footsteps of Saint John Paul 2, Dr. Savage looks to Sacred Scripture and to Sacred Tradition, in her quest to identify the masculine genius.

Adam, in the Book of Genesis, is tasked with naming all of the things of creation, all the lower-order creatures. He names the woman as well, but recognizes her as different from the other creatures, his equal, saying "This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man (Genesis 2:23)."

Delving further into the meaning of Genesis, Dr. Savage highlights the fact that the man, Adam, was created and existed for a time without the woman and that he worked in the garden and named the things of creation. Dr. Savage argues that man must have been given a special gift from God in order to be able to complete this monumental task. This, she says, reveals that part of men's genius is that he is orientated towards things, as opposed to people in the case of women. Men's orientation towards things has largely been viewed in a negative light (ie. the objectification of women), but Dr.

Savage views this uncorrupt orientation towards things as “his gift.” Accordingly, she says, “Men’s genius has made possible the development of civilizations; this charism is used to support the flourishing of families and of cultures.”

For example, men have historically come up with systems to organize society, including systems of law, philosophy, theology and other “systems that establish criteria by which we are able to decide if something is true or not,” Dr. Savage explains.

Part of the charism of men also made apparent by the Genesis creation account is found in the fact that Adam is the only one given a job by God: to tend to the garden. Therefore, according to Dr. Savage, men’s charism is also “to work without thanks.”

And while the feminine genius is tied to motherhood (a physical and spiritual reality), the masculine genius is tied to fatherhood (also a physical and spiritual reality). Whereas women’s charism is to nurture life, men’s charism is to protect life. Dr. Savage references the wisdom of Cardinal Scola when defining masculinity in family life. He specifies that men introduce children to the ‘law of exchange’ (ie. nothing is free) and women introduce children to the ‘law of gratuity’ (ie. unconditional love). These are tied to the attributes of fatherhood and motherhood, which make up the masculine and feminine genius.

Men are protectors, providers and teachers, helping children lay out their path in the world, Dr. Savage articulates. They do this through their fatherhood, which can be either physical or spiritual in nature. To be a father, she argues, is “not merely a biological reality.” Men can be spiritual fathers as well, as in the case of the priesthood (more on this next month).

I’ll end this summary of Dr. Deborah Savage’s interpretation of Genesis and identification of the masculine genius by referencing the science behind it. There are things that science may not yet be able to explain, but truth can never conflict with science. Sound science has consequently proven this interpretation of Genesis to be correct. Numerous studies have demonstrated that these traditional qualities of boys and girls are not socially constructed, much to the surprise of the researchers. Science also proves male and female difference and complementarity. The branch of Neuroscience concurs with this truth also. Dr. Savage summarizes some of the studies that have been conducted in the interview and outlines the results of this research. You will have to watch the interview for more information on this if it interests you.

### **A Shared Vocation:**

Saint John Paul the Great says that, “In the ‘unity of the two,’ man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist ‘side by side’ or ‘together,’ but they are also called to exist mutually, ‘one for the other’ (*Mulieris Dignitatem*).” This is part of our shared vocation! “[We] 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 (*Mulieris Dignitatem*).”

Accordingly, our main mission (men and women) is to help each other to see God... to attain salvation! How do we do this? Saint John Paul 2 in his apostolic letter quotes the documents of the Second Vatican Council numerous times: “man [men and women alike] cannot truly find himself except through a sincere gift of self (*Mulieris Dignitatem*).” Men and women alike! As men and women we act as “helpmates,” gifting ourselves to God and to each other, and using our complimentary strengths for the benefit of the other and of the world.

How do men and women differ in the way they offer a sincere gift of self? They offer this gift of self through their motherhood or through their fatherhood (either physically or spiritually). “Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person: and this is precisely the woman’s ‘part.’ In this openness, in conceiving and giving birth to a child, the woman ‘discovers herself through a sincere gift of self’ (*Mulieris Dignitatem*).” For men, this ‘sincere gift of self’ is discovered through his fatherhood (again physically or spiritually) as he seeks to protect the lives in his care.

Our shared vocation is therefore to become one with God by following His divine will, and by offering oneself as a gift of love for the nurturing or the protection of life, according to one’s state in life (ie. consecrated virginity or marriage). We don’t only “make families together, we make history together (*Mulieris Dignitatem*).”

However, we must be careful, as “Biblical ‘knowledge’ is achieved in accordance with the truth of the person only when the mutual self-giving is not distorted either by the desire of the man to become ‘master’ of his wife (“he shall rule over you”) or by woman remaining closed within her own instincts (“your desire shall be for your husband”: Gen 3:16).” Hence, It is important to note that our charisms can quickly become tainted and that God’s plan for men and women can easily be distorted and maimed. We have seen this happen throughout the history of mankind and it is still an issue today.

### **The Corruption of the Masculine and Feminine Genius:**

Due to original sin, the corruption of our masculine and feminine charisms is unfortunately common. According to 1 Corinthians 11, man falls to “domination” and woman falls to “vain glory” (vanity).

In looking at the Gospels, JP2 points out that Jesus often called out men for their transgressions against women, as in the case of the woman accused of adultery. He says, “A woman is left alone, exposed to public opinion with ‘her sin,’ while behind ‘her’ sin there lurks a man – a sinner guilty ‘of the other’s sin,’ indeed equally responsible for it.” Jesus calls out her accusers on this and they do not end up stoning her (see John 8:1-11 to read the entire account).

Isn’t it true that this same situation plays out to this day in different contexts? Just think of the woman left alone with an unplanned pregnancy. In his “Letter to Women,” JP2 gives a concrete example of this saying, “An abortion always remains a grave sin. But before being something to blame on the woman, it is a crime for which guilt needs to be attributed to men and to the complicity of the general social environment.” JP2 very much acknowledges the injustice of this and says that, while a woman’s dignity, “directly depends on herself, as a subject responsible for herself,” this dignity is at the same time, “‘given as a task’ to man.”

In other words, men must ensure that they work to uphold the dignity of women. I discussed in an earlier commentary the passage from scripture that makes this truth apparent (see Ephesians 5:25-29). JP2 notes that “Consequently, each man must look within himself to see whether she who was entrusted to him as a sister in humanity, as a spouse, has not become in his heart an object of adultery; to see whether she who, in different ways, is the cosubject of his existence in the world, has not become for him an ‘object’: an object of pleasure, of exploitation (*Mulieris Dignitatem*).” St. John Paul 2 challenges men in this regard.

Similarly, Dr. Deborah Savage outlines that, “Women’s work is to remind men that all human activity must be ordered toward authentic human flourishing” and stipulates that women should take on this role in all areas of society (family, culture, everywhere she works). She is Adam’s “helpmate,” or as Dr. Savage explains, “divine aid” would be a more suitable translation of the original language of the creation account in Genesis. It is the woman’s job to “help men to live,” she says.

Dr. Savage and Saint John Paul 2 both acknowledge the fact that women have experienced disadvantage and discrimination. JP2 denounces this unjust discrimination, and determines that “whenever man is responsible for offending a woman’s personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation.” JP2 also specifies, however, that “in the name of liberation from male ‘domination,’ women must not appropriate themselves male characteristics contrary to their feminine ‘originality’ (*Mulieris Dignitatem*).”

Likewise, Dr. Savage says that women have their own authority and that we should not try to imitate what men do. She acknowledges that women in fact have tremendous power, which has been misused. I agree.

### **Conclusion: Women and Societal Change**

I will end part 6 of my commentary on true feminism by emphasizing the necessity of the feminine genius in our society. More than ever, as women, we need to assert our incorrupt feminine genius for the betterment of our society and of our world! This means that we recognize the essential nature of motherhood (physical and spiritual), thereby distinguishing women from men and highlighting the dignity of women!

Women's more challenging role in the parenting of children must be acknowledged. JP2 recognizes that, "Although both [men and women] together are parents of the child, the woman's motherhood constitutes a special 'part' in this shared parenthood, and the most demanding part. Parenthood – even though it belongs to both – is realized much more fully in woman, especially in the prenatal period." He continues, "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."

John Paul 2, in his wisdom, also sheds light on the fact that, "In our own time, the successes of science and technology make it possible to attain material well-being to a degree hitherto unknown. While this favours some, it pushes others to the edges of society. In this way, unilateral progress can also lead to a gradual loss of sensitivity for man, that is, for what is essentially human. In this sense, our time in particular awaits the manifestation of that 'genius' which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human! – and because 'the greatest of these is love' (1 Cor 13:13)." If women recognize this special entrustment of human life to their care and live by their vocation to love, then this verse "The greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13)" "will have its definitive fulfillment (*Mulieris Dignitatem*)."

By the grace of God, I can now echo St. Thérèse's wisdom: "My vocation, at last I have found it; my vocation is love." She is another doctor of the Church, a saint who followed God's will for her by completing her seemingly insignificant daily tasks with great love. St. Teresa of Avila recognized the importance of love in her vocation as well. She says: "The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love." Whatever we do, great or small, our vocation as men and women is to love, to use our God-given gifts to further the Kingdom of God through love!

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength. This is the first commandment. And the second is like to it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30-31)."

In both of his letters pertaining to women, JP2 calls for affirmative action, for: "an effective campaign for the promotion of women, concentrating on all areas of women's life and beginning with a universal recognition of the dignity of women (*Mulieris Dignitatem*)."

This is where true feminism will lead us.

There is much to be done, but I pray that we will all come to know our masculine or feminine genius and live our vocation to love, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, and through the intercession of our Blessed Spiritual Mother, Mary. Amen!

Your sister in Christ,



Jocelyne

## Also Quoted

*"Mulieris Dignitatem" By Saint Pope John Paul 2*

Vatican Link → [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_29061995\\_women.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html)

&

*"Letter to Women" By Saint Pope John Paul 2*

Vatican Link → [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880815\\_mulieris-dignitatem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html)