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THE *FEMININE GENIUS* ACCORDING TO EDITH STEIN*

This article is an attempt to answer the following questions concerning the *feminine genius*: What is spiritual motherhood? What is spiritual companionship? How can women express the qualities of companionship and motherhood in and out of their homes? What kind of obstacles do women need to root out of their hearts to build loving relationships? And, How does emotional formation prepare women for their vocation? The answers will be sought from Edith Stein’s perspective, i.e. by drawing from the usage of phenomenology and Thomism adopted in her *Essays on Women*.¹

The article consists of three sections. First, “Being Wife and Mother in and out of the Home,” where we will discuss the twofold vocation of women—to be wives, or companions, and to be mothers—and how women express these vocations in a spiritual way in family,

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¹ Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, ed. Lucy Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, O.C.D., trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996). Hereafter Stein’s book will be cited: Stein, *Woman*.

professional, and religious life.² Second, “Rooting out the Heart’s Obstacles to Building Loving Relationships,” where we will discuss the obstacles that women need to root out of their hearts, obstacles that prevent them from being the spiritual mothers and spiritual companions their family and community needs. Finally, “Emotional Formation as the Key to Unlocking the *Feminine Genius*” will look at how emotional formation, as prescribed by Stein, is the key to unlocking the *feminine genius*.

Being Wife and Mother in and out of the Home

Women are called to receive all people in their heart as spiritual mothers and spiritual companions.³ Today, women continue to struggle to find the necessary balance between being both the heart of the home

² Cf. Lucy Gelber, “Editor’s Introduction to the First Edition,” in Stein, *Woman*, 11: “To be a wife is to be the husband’s companion and, as such, to support and safeguard her husband, her family, and the human community. To be a mother innately means to cultivate, to guard, and to develop true humanity.”

³ Stein teaches that the nature and vocation of women is to be wives and mothers. Thus, maternity and companionship is woman’s natural vocation. Katharina Westerhorstmann explains, “This natural vocation to womanhood grounds on special natural dispositions that are peculiarly female. They render the actualization of the two natural vocations possible, [i.e. that of mother and that of companion]. At first, this is not a matter of force, of social necessity or duty. It rather corresponds to the female nature and being, and is simultaneously a special gift which turns into a task. The natural disposition which is directly linked to the two basic vocations consists in the peculiarly female sympathy for the lives of others. For, according to Edith Stein, women are (by nature) primarily directed to the personal element. First of all, they are interested in the person and not so much in things . . . In Stein’s eyes, this disposition plays an important role not only in marriage, family life, and one’s own circle of friends, but also and above all in society and working environments.” Katharina Westerhorstmann, “On the Nature and Vocation of Women: Edith Stein’s Concept against the Background of a Radically Deconstructive Position,” 9, accessed Jan. 15, 2017, <http://www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/documenti/donna/filosofia/english/on-the-nature-and-vocation-of-women-edith-steins.pdf>.

and the heart of society;⁴ i.e. to be the *Proverbs 31* woman. The *Proverbs 31* woman fulfills both her domestic and societal duties in an inspiring and tireless manner:

[She] works with her hands in delight. . . . [She] stretches out her hands to the needy. . . . Strength and dignity are her clothing. . . . She smiles at the future. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: “Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.”⁵

Stein’s lectures offer women guiding principles for how they can be this inspiring *Proverbs 31* woman. Freda Mary Oben, the translator of Stein’s lectures, shares the personal impact Stein’s wisdom had in her own life and how it can help women today: “I was convinced that she was the needed catalyst in our society’s confusion concerning the role of woman . . . [and] to establish an equilibrium in . . . family and professional life.”⁶

Women are called to express their qualities of maternity and companionship with everyone with whom they come in contact, whether it be at home, at church, in the office, in the gym, etc. In her book *Edith Stein: Scholar, Feminist, Saint*, Oben best explains the meaning of spiritual motherhood and spiritual companionship:

The core, the key to woman, is to be mother and spouse, mother and companion. Let me stress that Edith’s concepts of maternity and companionship are not at all limited to the married state. This distinctive feminine nature belongs essentially to the woman

⁴ John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (Pastoral Letter of June 29, 1995), § 2, available at the Holy See website: www.vatican.va.

⁵ Proverbs 31:13, 20, 25–29. All biblical citations come from: *The New American Standard Bible*, available at: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/nas/>.

⁶ Freda Mary Oben, “Translator’s Preface to the First Edition,” in Stein, *Woman*, ix–x.

in any role she may play—single, married or religious. . . . This supreme gift which only woman possesses . . . goes out to everyone who she comes into contact with . . . whether it be in family, public or professional life. It is the key not only to her nature but to her intrinsic value as woman.⁷

Women must always recall this powerful calling no matter where they are and who they are with.⁸ Women are called to not only be wife and mother in her home, but also in society. But what does being a spiritual mother and spiritual wife or companion look like? These distinctive callings find their expressions in woman's person-oriented attitude. This attitude is colored not only by woman's readiness to help those in need but also by her intuition and sensitivity that brings the needs of others to her attention in the first place.

The person-oriented feminine spiritual attitude encompasses maternity and companionship, but what does this mean? As regards maternity, Stein says:

⁷ Freda Mary Oben, *Edith Stein: Scholar, Feminist, Saint* (New York: Alba House, 1988), 43.

⁸ "Woman's nature is determined by her original vocation of spouse and mother." Stein, *Woman*, 132. Woman's fallen nature powerfully drives and urges her thoughts and deeds to oppose her vocation of spouse and mother. Hence, women need to constantly recall the reason for why they were created and the meaning of their *feminine genius* (*Ibid.*, 48).

As John Paul II teaches, man's redemption in Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, restores, "at its very root, the good that was essentially 'diminished' by sin and its heritage in human history." John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year, Aug. 15, 1988), § 11, available at the Holy See Website: www.vatican.va.

Moreover, as the *Catechism* teaches, original sin, although not totally corrupting human nature, wounds its natural powers and inclines them to sin, i.e. an inclination to evil or concupiscence. While Christ's redemptive grace, received in Baptism, erases original sin and turns man back towards God, "the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 405. Thus, women need to daily take up spiritual battle against all evil which obscures and hinders the living out of her original maternal and spousal vocation.

Woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is living, personal, and whole. To cherish, guard, protect, nourish and advance growth is her natural, maternal yearning. Lifeless matter, the fact, can hold primary interest in her insofar as it serves the living and the personal, not ordinarily for its own sake. . . . Her natural line of thought is not so much conceptual and analytical as it is directed intuitively and emotionally to the concrete. This natural endowment enables women to guard and teach her own children. But this basic attitude is not intended just for them; she should behave in this way also to her husband and to all those in contact with her.⁹

In sum, the qualities of maternity are colored by the living and the personal. Women are interested in people and in human conditions not so much in a conceptual or abstract way but in an intuitive, emotional, and concrete way.¹⁰ So, there is the need of this aspect of the *feminine genius* in the home and in society by upholding the richness of women's sensitivity, intuitiveness, generosity, and fidelity.¹¹ These feminine gifts make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture that promotes a civilization worthy of persons by helping make

⁹ Stein, *Woman*, 45.

¹⁰ Sarah Borden explains woman's discontent to remain at the level of the abstract: "In saying that women are more personally and less objectively-oriented, Stein is not claiming that women are less capable of abstract thought; rather . . . 'characteristically, women are not content to remain on the level of the abstract.' There is a drive in the feminine to relate the conceptual back to the concrete, the psychological back to particular psyches, and the theoretical back to the world of experience. Thus, the orientation toward the personal and concrete need not be a denial of the abstract and conceptual, but it does indicate a dissatisfaction with the merely abstract and conceptual, and an unhappiness with only a part when one can be oriented to the whole." Sarah Borden, *Edith Stein* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 71.

¹¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, § 4 "In all these areas a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable, for it will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity, and it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favors the processes of humanization which mark the *civilization of love*."

human relations more honest and authentic through the marriage of reason and feeling.

The maternal attitude is essential, for example, in policy making. We can think of many examples of how the sensitivity of women and their person-oriented attitude is needed in all kinds of policy making in the various government departments.

For example, the person-oriented attitude of women in drafting health care programs, which affect individual people, is absolutely necessary in an area as sensitive as the access to and affordability of medical care. Moreover, whether in the department of education in areas such as school funding, which effect things such as after school care programs; or in the department of health and human services, which includes foster care programs; and the department of homeland security with the sensitive and ever more complex issue of illegal immigration and the breakup of the family; or the department of housing and urban development that offers low income families the ability to rent affordable apartments; and the department of transportation, which determines where bus stops will be placed. These are all but a few examples of places where the *feminine genius* and the marriage of reason and feeling are needed to remember the person and the concrete human condition.

The maternal gift is joined to the gift of companionship. As regards companionship and how it extends not only to a woman's husband but to all with whom she comes in contact, Stein explains:

It is [woman's] gift and happiness to share her life with another human being, and indeed, to take part in all things which come his way, in the greatest and smallest things, in joy as well as in suffering, in work, and in problems. Man is consumed by 'his enterprise,' and he expects others will be interested and helpful; generally, it is difficult for him to become involved in other beings and their concerns. On the contrary, it is natural for woman, and she has the faculty to interest herself empathetically in areas of knowledge far from her own concerns and to which she would

pay no heed if it were not that a personal interest drew her in contact with them. This endowment is bound closely to her maternal gift. An active sympathy for those who fall within her ken awakens their powers and heightens their achievements. It is a concerned, formative, and truly maternal function, precisely on which even the adult needs. This function will come into play also with one's own children, especially when they mature and the mother is released from their physical care.¹²

The first line is the key to understanding what it means to be a companion: "It is [woman's] gift and happiness to share her life of another human being."¹³ Women find their fulfillment in walking side by side others, in both the best and the worst of times. Moreover, women have a special knack, an active sympathy, for interesting themselves in all sorts of subject matters for which their only interest is to help others.

For example, how did my mother acquire an engineer's vocabulary? Was it not because she was my father's attentive audience all these years as he ran over his proposals with her prior to presenting them to his co-workers? And, how did I, who needs to wake up every couple of hours to nurse my newborn, find myself awake two nights ago at two in the morning trying to learn computer programming language? Precisely because I wanted to help my husband improve his business webpage. Women surprise themselves every day with their ability to, as Stein says, "actively sympathize" with what they would otherwise consider mundane.

The following subsections will look at what spiritual companionship and spiritual motherhood look like in (1) the natural vocation of wife and mother, (2) in the professional sector, and (3) in religious life.

¹² Stein, *Woman*, 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The Natural Vocation of Wife and Mother

Thank you, women who are mothers! You have sheltered human beings within yourselves in a unique experience of joy and travail. This experience makes you become God's own smile upon the newborn child, the one who guides your child's first steps, who helps it to grow, and who is the anchor as the child makes its way along the journey of life. Thank you, women who are wives! You irrevocably join your future to that of your husbands, in a relationship of mutual giving, at the service of love and life.¹⁴

Women have a primary natural vocation to be wives and mothers; Scripture declares this and daily experience attests it. In a somewhat humorous tone, Stein says this: "Only the person blinded by the passion of controversy could deny that women in soul and body is formed for a particular purpose . . . woman is destined to be wife and mother."¹⁵ Practical experience demonstrates that she is endowed both physically and spiritually for this purpose. For Stein, this follows from the Thomistic principle of *anima forma corporis*, i.e. that the soul informs the body.¹⁶

Katharina Westerhorstmann explains this concept of *anima forma corporis* as it relates to Stein's understanding of not only male and female bodies, but also their corresponding male and female souls:

Edith Stein first of all focuses on the body as the visible expression of human being. Usually it serves as an indicator for identifying a person as man or woman. In accordance with the classical Scholastic principle of "anima forma corporis" (the soul is the form of the body), Stein follows Thomas Aquinas, assuming that it is the soul which provides the body with a specific gestalt. . . . Whenever Stein speaks of the woman, she is, of course, con-

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, § 2.

¹⁵ Stein, *Woman*, 45.

¹⁶ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 76, Art. 1, Resp.

scious of the fact that every woman develops her femininity in her own individual way. She nevertheless assumes that the body can offer an indication of something like a common structure of the soul that all women share, irrespective of their differences.¹⁷

Drawing from Thomism, according to Stein, the feminine body corresponds to a feminine soul just as the masculine body corresponds to a masculine soul. The design of the feminine body reveals woman's natural vocation to be wife and mother.

John Paul II too draws vocational meaning from the masculine and the feminine bodies; he calls this the "sacramentality of the body" since the body is a visible sign of an invisible reality.¹⁸ That is, the very design of male and female bodies reveals the complementarity of man and woman and their vocation for marriage and family. His teachings on the *Theology of the Body* support Stein's understanding of how both Scripture and daily experience attest to woman's vocation to be wife and mother. In his General Audiences, the Holy Father reflects on how the creation of man as male and female, in their sexually differentiated bodies, reveals truths about the nature and vocation of men and women. What truths can we discover from meditating on the female body? In his General Audience, "Mystery of Woman Revealed in Motherhood," he says of Eve,

the specific determination of the woman, through her own body and sex, hid what constitutes the depth of her femininity . . . the mystery of femininity is manifested and revealed completely by means of motherhood. . . . The woman stands before the man as a

¹⁷ Westerhorstmann, "On the Nature and Vocation of Women," 7.

¹⁸ See John Paul II, "Marital Love Reflects God's Love for His People," General Audience of 28 July 1982, § 5, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (2 August 1982): 7.

mother, the subject of the new human life that is conceived and develops in her, and from her is born into the world.¹⁹

John Paul II refers to the physical complementarity of the male and female bodies as the “nuptial meaning of the body.”²⁰ That is, by their very physiological constitutions, the bodies of men and women are made for each other, for conjugal union and procreation. The *Theology of the Body*, then, reveals that men and women are called to marriage and family.

Having established that marriage and family, i.e. to be wife and mother, is woman’s natural vocation, we can now ask: how do women live out spiritual motherhood and spiritual companionship to express their *feminine genius* in their natural vocation?

Stein writes,

The image of the Mother of God demonstrates the basic spiritual attitude which corresponds to woman’s natural vocation; her relationship to her husband is one of obedience, trust, and participation in his life as she furthers his objective tasks and personality development; to the child she gives true care, encouragement, and formation of his God-given talents; she offers both selfless surrender and a quiet withdrawal when unneeded. All is based on

¹⁹ “Likewise, the mystery of man’s masculinity, that is, the generative and fatherly meaning of his body, is also thoroughly revealed.” John Paul II, “Mystery of Woman Revealed in Motherhood,” General Audience of 12 March 1980, § 2, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (17 March 1980): 1.

²⁰ “The body which expresses femininity manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons. It expresses it by means of the gift as the fundamental characteristic of personal existence. This is the body, a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and so a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs. Masculinity and femininity—namely, sex—is the original sign of a creative donation and an awareness on the part of man, male-female, of a gift lived in an original way. Such is the meaning with which sex enters the theology of the body.” John Paul II, “Revelation and Discovery of the Nuptial Meaning of the Body,” General Audience of 9 January 1980, § 4, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (14 January 1980): 1.

the concept of marriage and motherhood as a vocation from God; it is carried out for God's sake and under His guidance.²¹

For Stein, then, marriage and motherhood are vocations from God to be lived out for God. As wives, women are called to be their husband's companion, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death. Stein taking from St. Paul's teachings found in Ephesians 5:22–30, says: "Participation in her husband's life requires subordination and obedience as directed by God's word. . . . The natural vocation of man [is] guide and protector of his wife [and children]."²² Women often view St. Paul's words with suspicion; what does submission actually mean in the context of St. Paul's chapter?

The first line of the passage, which tells both spouses to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,²³ is often overlooked. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* sheds light on what mutual submission as lived out in marriage means. The Holy Father teaches that the wife's being subject to the husband does not mean that she is dominated by him.²⁴ Rather, like the image of the Church to Christ, she is called to experience the love of the husband in a free, total, faithful, and fruitful way.²⁵ This love makes the husband simultaneously subject to the wife.

²¹ Stein, *Woman*, 48.

²² *Ibid.*, 46.

²³ See Ephesians 5:21.

²⁴ "The matrimonial union requires respect for and a perfecting of the true personal subjectivity of both of them. The woman cannot become the 'object' of 'domination' and male 'possession.'" John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, § 10.

²⁵ See Christopher West, *Good News about Sex and Marriage* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2004), and John Paul II, "Sacredness of Human Body and Marriage," General Audience of 1 September 1982, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (6 September 1982): 3.

Moreover, the husband is to love the wife just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for Her.²⁶ In this sense the wife is called to participate in her husband's life.

When the wife expresses her *feminine genius*, her active sympathy awakens a husband's talents and heightens his achievements. Her empathy over her husband's concerns encourage him to work harder for the good of the family. Whereas men can become consumed by their enterprise and expect others to be interested and helpful, it is generally more difficult for them to become involved and interested in the concern of others.²⁷ John Paul II teaches that it is precisely here that the mother's personal outlook can encourage the father to take an active interest in the lives of his children:

It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. The man—even with all his sharing in parenthood—always remains “outside” the process of pregnancy and the baby's birth; in many ways he has to learn his own “fatherhood” from the mother. . . . The child's upbringing, taken as a whole, should include the contribution of both parents. . . . In any event, the mother's contribution is decisive in laying the foundation for a new human personality.²⁸

Like John Paul II, Stein teaches that the mother's contribution in childrearing is decisive in laying the foundation for the child's personality. In fact, it is the mother, through her intuitive grasp and emotional perception, who is called and equipped to detect her child's individuali-

²⁶ See Ephesians 5:25.

²⁷ It is important to note that man's ability to concentrate in his particular task is his virtue. Woman's ability on the other hand to, as is commonly said, 'multi-task,' enables her to concern herself with all the people in her family. The man and the woman complement each other in this way. Stein, *Woman*, 46.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, § 18.

ty and the needs that arise from it.²⁹ It is difficult to list an example, as there are too many wonderful examples of devoted mothers who attentively and selflessly care for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of their children.³⁰

The same spiritual attitude of wife and mother, one that concerns itself with the individual person, is needed when women participate in the professional sector.

Women in the Professional Sector

Thank you, women who work! You are present and active in every area of life-social, economic, cultural, artistic and political. In this way you make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling, to a model of life ever open to the sense of “mystery,” to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity.³¹

In her Preface to Stein’s *Essays on Woman*, Oben writes that “Stein teaches the woman how to be a balanced and fulfilled person in today’s world,” because our “world is going through a crisis of dehu-

²⁹ See Stein, *Woman*, 215. Stein specifically discusses the importance of the mother’s example for the daughter’s personality development. She also discusses the importance of the father’s role in the girl’s development.

³⁰ Of the mother’s role in her daughter’s personality development, Stein says: “The mother is the most essential agent of a girl’s formation in the family . . . The most essential factor in the formation of pure womanhood must be growing up near a woman who embodies it. And the mother who does not embody this fails in her mission. A mother’s example is . . . fundamental.” Stein, *Woman*, 215.

Modern psychology reveals the importance of the mother for the child’s personality development even in the earliest months of a baby’s life. The emotional bonding of mother and infant influences the way the child will behave in social and emotional settings in later years. It is the mother who teaches the child about the importance of being able to trust others, feel secure, and be sensitive toward the needs of others. The physical or emotional absence of a mother in a child’s life can be detrimental to his or her personality development and can take years of hard work in order to fully heal. See Jasmin Lee Cori, *The Emotionally Absent Mother: How to Recognize and Heal the Invisible Effects of Childhood Emotional Neglect* (New York: The Experiment, 2017).

³¹ John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, § 2.

manization, breakup of family life, a general loss of moral values,” and today’s “woman faces a more dramatic and severe challenge than ever.” And she concludes: “The family needs her but society needs her also.”³²

With this challenge in mind, Stein asks, “Are there feminine vocations other than the natural one?”³³ Not unlike John Paul II, in her philosophy of woman, Stein teaches that both the home and society need the mother and the wife. She upholds the indispensability and irreplaceability of the wife and mother in the home while also insisting on the importance and necessity of women in society. In Stein’s words, “The question whether women should enter the professional life or stay at home has been controversial for some time.”³⁴ Stein holds to a middle ground. She defends the significance of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*, but she also defends the importance of the participation of women as equal and complementary members of society.

Let’s use the question Stein poses at the beginning of her lecture on the ethos of woman’s professions as a springboard to discuss how women can live out their *feminine genius* in the professional sector:

Are we able to speak of vocations which are specifically feminine? In the beginning of the feminist movement, the radical leaders denied this, claiming that all professions are suitable for woman. Their opponents are unwilling to admit to this concept, recognizing only one feminine vocation. Our subject requires discussion of both points of view.³⁵

In this lecture, Stein explains the importance of studying both points of view. While women have the primary natural vocation of

³² Freda Mary Oben, “Translator’s Preface to the Second Edition,” in Stein, *Woman*, vii.

³³ Stein, *Woman*, 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

spouse and mother, women also can have secondary vocations to which they feel called to by God in the various professions.³⁶

Outside of the primary natural vocation of women, then, individual women also are called to secondary vocations, i.e. the professions. Stein comments,

Only subjective delusion could deny that women are capable of practicing vocations other than that of spouse and mother. The experience of the last decades, and, for that matter, the experience of all times has demonstrated this. One could say that in case of need, every normal and healthy woman is able to hold a position. And there is no profession which cannot be practiced by a woman.³⁷

As Stein teaches, there is no profession which cannot be practiced by a woman. Why? Because, “no woman is only woman; like man, each has her individual specialty and talent, and this talent gives her the capability of doing professional work, be it artistic, scientific, technical, etc.”³⁸ Stein points to the many self-sacrificing women that have needed to work to replace the breadwinner of fatherless children, or supporting abandoned children or aged parents.³⁹ Of course, women do not only work for these kinds of reasons. Each woman has individu-

³⁶ For Stein, a woman’s profession should be seen as a calling from God. Stein explains what she means when she uses the term ‘vocation:’ “In everyday usage, the hackneyed word ‘vocation’ retains little of its original connotation. When young people are about to graduate, one wonders what occupation they should pursue . . . Here the term designating vocation does not convey much more than gainful employment . . . A vocation is something to which a person must be called . . . A call must have been sent from someone, to someone, for something in a distinct manner . . . The person’s nature and his life’s course are no . . . trick of change, but—seen with the eyes of faith—the work of God. And thus, finally, it is God Himself who calls . . . each individual to that to which he or she is called personally, and, over and above this, He calls man and woman as such to something specific.” *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

al talents that can greatly benefit society, and each individual woman's tendencies will lead them to the most diversified professions: "essentially, the individual talent can enable her to embark on any discipline, even those remote from the usual feminine vocations."⁴⁰

What are the "usual feminine vocations?" These are the professions that depend on the natural qualities of women, such as sympathetic rapport. As Stein says, "certain abiding attitudes are unique to the feminine soul and form woman's professional life from within out; [and] the very nature of woman draws her to certain professions."⁴¹ For example, these include nursing, education, and social work; as well as the entire range of social services.⁴² What about those professions that are usually termed as specifically masculine? Stein says of these that they "could yet be practiced in an authentically feminine way if as accepted as part of the concrete human condition . . . [since] everything abstract is ultimately part of the concrete. Everything inanimate finally serves the living."⁴³

Thus, women can reveal their *feminine genius* through work in a factory, business office, in national or municipal service, legislature, chemical laboratories, or mathematical institute by offering a "blessed counterbalance" precisely here in these typically masculine professions, which fall prey to mechanization and dehumanization.⁴⁴ For example, while men can aim at the most perfect juridical form in law or in ordinance, he might give little heed to the concrete circumstances directly affected by these laws and ordinances. While women, if they remain true to their feminine nature and ethos, will, through the marriage of

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

reason and feeling, “look to the concrete goal and adjust the means to the end” even in government service.⁴⁵

Of all the possible secondary vocations, whether the usual feminine vocations or others, Stein says, “the same spiritual attitude which the wife and mother is needed here also, except that it is extended to a wider working circle and mostly to a changing area of people.”⁴⁶ Of the secondary vocations, Stein says that, since they are detached from the vital bond of blood relationship, and, thus, lack in the natural motivating powers of serving one’s own husband or children, women can express a greater spiritual attitude and power of self-sacrifice.⁴⁷

In addition to professional work, I would also include volunteer services provided by women. Many women do not receive recognition or compensation for the massive amount of work they do as volunteers in their communities. Moreover, many single women, those who never wedded or became widowed and did not have children, do incredible work and bless others with their *feminine genius* as spiritual mothers and companions.

For Stein, whatever profession a woman practices, she should view it as her God-given vocation and not as a mere source of income. As she says, “A person’s attitude toward his or her profession clearly helps determine the results achieved in it. Whoever regards his work as a mere source of income or as a pastime will perform it differently from the person who feels that his profession is an authentic vocation.”⁴⁸ For Stein, women who view their profession as a vocation from God is to live out the professional ethos sincerely and authentically. Concerning the moral character of professional work, such as honesty in one’s work ethic, conscientiousness of one’s co-workers, and loyalty to one’s com-

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

pany, woman's professional ethos should motivate her to constantly practice what is required to acquire this attitude in order to do her job well. This professional ethos colors all the professional vocations in different ways; the nurse, for example, needs the attitude of helpfulness.⁴⁹ Whether or not the nurse has a natural inclination to be helpful, Stein says that her professional ethos should motivate her to acquire this attitude.

Certainly, a woman's spiritual attitude of mother and companion in her professional life will be thwarted if she is not living out this attitude at home. This is precisely with what Stein disagreed concerning the feminist movement. Various aspects of the feminist movement jeopardize domestic life when they encourage women to put professional activity above their primary natural vocation.⁵⁰ A home's wife and mother cannot be replaced.⁵¹ John Paul II is in agreement with Stein. "In rearing children—he writes—mothers have a singularly important role," therefore, each of them "gives the child the sense of security and trust without which the child would find it difficult to develop properly its own personal identity and subsequently, to establish positive and fruitful relationships with others."⁵² Moreover,

The employment of women outside the family, especially during the period when they are fulfilling the most delicate tasks of motherhood, must be done with respect for this fundamental duty. However, apart from this requirement, it is necessary to strive

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ See Alice von Hildebrand, *The Privilege of Being a Woman* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

⁵¹ As regards to men, Stein also sees the importance of the father/husband's presence in the home. She says, "It even seems to me a contradiction of the divine order when the professional activities of the husband escalate to a degree which cuts him off completely from family life. [Nevertheless,] This is even more true of the wife." Stein, *Woman*, 80.

⁵² John Paul II, "Women: Teachers of Peace," World Day of Peace Message (1 January 1995), § 6, accessed Jan. 30, 2017, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en.html>.

convincingly to ensure that the widest possible space is open to women in all areas of culture, economics, politics, and ecclesial life itself, so that all human society is increasingly enriched by the gifts proper to masculinity and femininity.⁵³

Thus, Stein, while recognizing that the suffragettes justifiably fought for women's right to participate in the professional sector,⁵⁴ disagrees with the leaders of the feminist movement who denied the primacy of woman's natural vocation.

In essence, woman is destined to be wife and mother, and she is endowed both physically and spiritually for this purpose. Moreover, women are called to express their *feminine genius*, i.e. their personal outlook, active sympathy, intuitive grasp, and emotional perception, in domestic and in professional life.

The next subsection will look at how the *feminine genius* is expressed in religious life.

The Supernatural Vocation of Woman

Thank you, consecrated women! Following the example of the greatest of woman, the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, you open yourselves with obedience and fidelity to the gift of God's love. You help the Church and all mankind to experience a "spousal" relationship to God, one which magnificently expresses the fellowship which God wishes to establish with his creatures.⁵⁵

We would do injustice to Stein's life and work if we were to ignore the supernatural vocation of woman. When women become spouses of Christ, their home is the kingdom of God and their family is the communion of saints. As Pope John Paul II explains, while "the reli-

⁵³ John Paul II, "Society and Church Need Genius of Woman," *Angelus*, 23 July 1995, § 3, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (26 July 1995): 1.

⁵⁴ See John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, § 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, § 2.

gious vocation is the total surrender of the whole person and his or her entire life to the service of God,” including the “renunciation of every vital human tie and relationship,” this renunciation is at the same time an affirmation of the natural vocations. “The celibate life, while it entails sacrificing life with a husband and biological children, invites the religious to share her life as a spiritual companion and spiritual mother to the Church faithful.”⁵⁶

While private domestic life and public professional life are rich and fruitful, they do not exhaust the potential of women.⁵⁷ If the professional life of women, detached from the vital bond of blood relationship, expresses a greater spiritual attitude, one of self-giving, than service to one’s own husband and children,⁵⁸ how much more does the renunciation of both family and wealth for the holy service of God express the *feminine genius*? As Stein says, the total surrender of self to God entails the total “renunciation of every possession, of every vital human tie and relationship, and even of his own will” in order to serve God.⁵⁹

John Paul II’s General Audiences on the *Theology of the Body*, and, specifically, his reflections on “celibacy for the Kingdom,” tie well into Stein’s teachings on the supernatural vocation.⁶⁰ John Paul II’s teachings on “celibacy for the kingdom” are taken directly from the mouth of Christ: “[T]here are eunuchs who have made themselves eu-

⁵⁶ John Paul II, “Celibacy for the Kingdom Affirms Marriage,” General Audience of 5 May 1982, § 4, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (10 May 1982): 3, and Stein, *Woman*, 52.

⁵⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁰ See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, Translation, Introduction, and Index by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006). Also available, as *General Audiences: John Paul II’s Theology of the Body*, at: <https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2TBIND.HTM>.

nuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”⁶¹ Taking from St. Paul,⁶² John Paul II sees religious life as a reflection of not only the marriage of Christ the Bridegroom with the Church the Bride,⁶³ but also as a foreshadowing of life in heaven, “For in the resurrection, neither do they marry, nor are they given in marriage, but they are like angels in heaven.”⁶⁴ Our Lord Himself upholds the dignity of the supernatural vocation and acknowledges how radical and difficult this calling is, “All cannot accept this [calling], but only those to whom it has been given.”⁶⁵ Regarding celibacy for the Kingdom, Stein says, “By His choice of the Virgin Mother, Christ did not only show God’s good pleasure and the redemptive power of virginity freely chosen, but He has pronounced most distinctly, that others are also called to virginity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”⁶⁶

Stein teaches that “today as in all times since Christ’s Church first existed, the Lord calls from families and professional life whomever He has chosen for His holy service.”⁶⁷ As John Paul II says, “In the light of Christ’s words, we must admit that this second kind of choice, namely, continence for the sake of the Kingdom of God, comes about . . . on the basis of full consciousness of that nuptial meaning which masculinity and femininity contain in themselves.”⁶⁸ Since, the supernatural vocation reflects the marriage of Christ and the Church, those who enter into religious life do so out of “a response of love for

⁶¹ Matthew 19:12.

⁶² See Ephesians 5:22–32.

⁶³ See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 796.

⁶⁴ Matthew 22:30.

⁶⁵ Matthew 19:11.

⁶⁶ Stein, *Woman*, 199.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁸ John Paul II, “Celibacy Is a Particular Response to the Love of the Divine Spouse,” General Audience of 28 April 1982, § 7, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (3 May 1982): 3.

the divine Spouse, and therefore has acquired the significance of an act of nuptial love . . . a giving of oneself understood as renunciation, but made above all out of love.”⁶⁹ The value of continence is thus found in love: it is the nuptial gift of self to Christ, the Spouse of the soul.

The renunciation of marriage and family life for the kingdom of heaven affirms the value and authenticity of the natural vocations:⁷⁰

Although continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (virginity, celibacy) orients the life of persons who freely choose it toward the exclusion of the common way of conjugal and family life, nevertheless it is not without significance for this life, for its style, its value and its evangelical authenticity.⁷¹

Celibacy for the Kingdom does not devalue marriage. Rather, marriage and continence complement each other since those men and women who are called to either state of life fulfill their calling in a spiritual paternity or maternity toward those in their care. As John Paul II teaches:

Marriage and continence are neither opposed to each other, nor do they divide the human (and Christian) community into two camps (let us say, those who are “perfect” because of continence and those who are “imperfect” or “less perfect” because of the reality of married life). But as it is often said, these two basic situations, these two “states,” in a certain sense explain and complete each other as regards the existence and Christian life of this community.⁷²

Moreover, not only are men and women called to express spiritual paternity and maternity in both the natural and supernatural voca-

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, § 1.

⁷⁰ See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1620.

⁷¹ John Paul II, “Celibacy for the Kingdom Affirms Marriage,” § 4.

⁷² John Paul II, “Marriage and Continence Complement Each Other,” General Audience of 14 April 1982, § 2, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (19 April 1982): 10.

tions, but the nature of both vocations is conjugal, since it is expressed in the total gift of oneself.⁷³

Since God calls both men and women out of their natural vocation to enter into religious life, it seems that the natural differences between the sexes is irrelevant to this supernatural vocation. Is it true that religious life abrogates the masculine and the feminine natures? Both Stein and John Paul II agree that religious life does not nullify the distinctiveness of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. On the contrary, referencing St. Thomas, Stein says “Grace perfects nature—it does not destroy it. . . . The masculine as well as the feminine nature is not abrogated in religious life but fitted into it in a particular way and thereby made fruitful.”⁷⁴

In particular, how is the feminine nature made fruitful by religious life? As Stein explains, when we consider the various kinds of religious activities and participation in them according to sex, we see indeed that each kind of activity is carried on by both men and women; however, the relationship of the activity to the nature of the sexes is different. The unity of the monastic order is expressed by the diversity of its individual members. While, contemplation and participation in liturgy, “a true angelic service,” transcend the difference of sex, men and women religious tend to commit to different activities within their religious order.⁷⁵

⁷³ “Conjugal love which finds its expression in continence for the kingdom of heaven must lead in its normal development to paternity or maternity in a spiritual sense (in other words, precisely to that fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit . . .) in a way analogous to conjugal love, which matures in physical paternity and maternity, and in this way confirms itself as conjugal love. For its part, physical procreation also fully responds to its meaning only if it is completed by paternity and maternity in the spirit, whose expression and fruit is all the educative work of the parents in regard to the children born of their conjugal corporeal union.” *Ibid.*, § 5.

⁷⁴ Stein, *Woman*, 51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

For example, spreading the faith, a priestly mission, is chiefly a masculine concern, although it is also carried on by women, especially those in the teaching orders. On the other hand, works of charity, which require the personal outlook, active sympathy, intuitive grasp, and emotional perception of the *feminine genius* to meet the needs of the particular human condition, are decidedly in keeping with the feminine nature. Nevertheless, whatever the activity, men and women will express their own genius in distinct ways.

However, how is the *feminine genius* in particular expressed in the supernatural vocation?

For Stein, the essential element of religious life—the absolute gift of self to God—is intimately tied to the feminine nature. Why? Because:

The deepest longing of woman's heart is to give herself lovingly, to belong to another, and to possess this other being completely. This longing is revealed in her outlook, her personal and all-embracing, which appears to us as specifically feminine.⁷⁶

For Stein, woman's desire to be fulfilled in this surrender to another person "is an unjustified demand which no human being can fulfill."⁷⁷ She says, that this surrender "becomes a perverted self-abandon and a form of slavery when it is given to another person and not to God."⁷⁸ In other words, only God can completely fulfill the heart of women and welcome their total surrender "in such a way that one does not lose one's soul in the process but wins it."⁷⁹

The more perfect the absolute gift of self to God,

the more richly will God's life fill the soul. Then, God's love is an overflowing love which wants nothing for itself but bestows

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

itself freely; mercifully, it bends down to everyone who is in need, healing the sick and awakening the dead to life, protecting, cherishing, nourishing, teaching, and forming; it is a love which sorrows with the sorrowful and rejoices with the joyful; it serves each human being to attain the end destined for it by the Father. In one word, it is the love of the divine Heart.⁸⁰

For Stein, then, “that is why total surrender which is the principal of religious life is simultaneously the only adequate fulfillment possible for woman’s yearning.”⁸¹ Notice, Stein does not say that religious life is the only adequate way to fulfill woman’s yearning, rather, it is the “principal” of total surrender to God which fulfills her. This principal corresponds not only to the religious sister, but also to the wife and mother, as well as to the professional woman.⁸² Hence, when Stein asks if all women need to enter into religious life to fulfill their vocation as women,⁸³ she answers “certainly not.”⁸⁴ Nevertheless, religious life does invite women in a unique way to live out this total surrender. In sum, then, women who renounce conjugal and family life for the sake of the Kingdom express their *feminine genius* through their total and sincere gift of themselves to God.

Having considered the nature of woman to be wife and mother in and out of the home, the next section will delve into the heart of women. In his *Letter to Women*, John Paul II discussed external obstacles which in so many parts of the world keep women from being fully integrated into social, political, and economic life, areas which need the sensitive and person-oriented human vision of women.⁸⁵ In the next section, we will discuss the internal obstacles that keep the *feminine*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ See John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, § 4.

genius locked inside of women's hearts and, hence, prevent them from building loving relationships.

Rooting out the Heart's Obstacles to Building Loving Relationships

What kind of obstacles do women find in their hearts, which prevent them from expressing the spiritual attitudes of maternity and companionships and from meeting the needs of the human condition? In other words, what prevents women from expressing their *feminine genius*? More importantly, how can they root these obstacles out in order that they may build loving relationships? The classic novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, comes to mind when pondering these questions.

In the first two chapters of *The Secret Garden*, Burnett describes her protagonist, Mary Lennox, in these words: “[S]he was as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived . . . as she was a self-absorbed child she gave her entire thought to herself.”⁸⁶ Burnett's story depicts the transformation of a girl's heart and her journey to building loving relationships. Like the secret garden, she unlocks her heart to give and to receive love and, thus, allows her *feminine genius* to take root and bear fruit. Mary not only builds loving relationships herself, but she also helps others build loving relationships, e.g. like that of her cousin Colin Craven and his father Archibald Craven who had had an estranged relationship. Mary's transformation from negativity to positivity,⁸⁷ calls to mind St. Paul's exhortation: “Finally, brethren, what-

⁸⁶ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005), 7 and 12.

⁸⁷ “So long as Mistress Mary's mind was full of disagreeable thoughts about her dislikes and sour opinions of people and her determination not to be pleased by or interested in anything, she was a yellow-faced, sickly, bored and wretched child . . . When her mind gradually filled itself with robins, and moorland cottages . . . with springtime and

ever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”⁸⁸ The heart, the center of the woman’s soul, is a garden that needs to be watered with all that is worthy of praise, e.g. love, peace, and gentleness. When women take the time to root out all that is unworthy of praise, e.g. hatred, anger, envy, they too, like Mary Lennox, will be able to let their *feminine genius* take root and bear fruit in a way that will benefit her and others.

Stein, speaking on the topic of an authentic feminine education, uses the analogy of a garden to teach how the first and fundamental formation happens from within:

Just as in the seeds of plants there resides an inner form which makes this one grow to be a fir, that one to be a beech, so in each human being there is a unique inner form which all education from outside must respect and aid in its movement toward the determined form, the mature, fully developed personality.⁸⁹

In his article, “The Heart of the Matter: Edith Stein on the Substance of the Soul,” Donald Wallenfang discusses how the meaningful fashioning of the personality takes place in the heart. He teaches that “the outward emanation of the incommunicable and unrepeatable personality of the individual” depends on how well the personality is meaningfully fashioned from within the innermost center of the soul, i.e. the heart.⁹⁰ Hence, in the measure that women develop their person-

with secret gardens coming alive day by day . . . there was no room for the disagreeable thoughts which affected her liver and her digestion and made her yellow and tired.” *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸⁸ Philippians 4:8.

⁸⁹ Stein, *Woman*, 130.

⁹⁰ Donald L. Wallenfang, “The Heart of the Matter: Edith Stein on the Substance of the Soul,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought & Culture* 17, no. 3 (2014): 122.

ality and become mature, they will be able to share themselves and their individual gifts, i.e. their *feminine genius*, with others.

Through meaningful inward fashioning of the heart, the souls of women will reveal expansiveness, quietness, warmth, self-containment or independence, self-emptiness or selflessness, and self-mastery in a harmonious way:

Woman's nature is determined by her original vocation of spouse and mother. . . . The soul of woman must therefore be "expansive" and open to all human beings; it must be "quiet" so that no small weak flame will be extinguished by stormy winds; "warm," so as not to benumb fragile buds; "clear," so that no vermin will settle in dark corners and recesses; "self-contained," so that no invasion from without can imperil the inner life; "empty of itself," in order that extraneous life may have room in it; finally, "mistress of itself" and also of its body, so that the entire person is readily at the disposal of every call. That is an ideal image of the gestalt of the feminine. The soul of the first woman was formed for this purpose, and so, too, was the soul of the Mother of God. In all other women since the Fall, there is an embryo of such development, but it needs particular cultivation if it is not to be suffocated among weeds rankly shooting up around it.⁹¹

All women should strive to cultivate the qualities or spiritual powers of expansiveness, quietness, warmth, clarity, independence, selflessness, and self-mastery. They need to cultivate their feminine spiritual attitude of spouse and mother to root out the "weeds" that threaten to suffocate her heart.

Stein offers examples of these "weeds" that can prevent women from building loving relationships. First, the personal outlook of women can become exaggerated when she penetrates into the life of others in an indiscreet and excessive way. This is shown in women's inclination to gossip out of mere curiosity and an unchecked need to com-

⁹¹ Stein, *Woman*, 132–133.

municate. Second, their personal outlook falls prey to vanity, to a desire for praise and recognition for all the “blessings” they have bestowed on others.⁹² Moreover, regarding their active sympathy in their relationship with others, women can easily become completely absorbed in the life of another beyond the measure required of them. Stein explains that “the sympathetic mate becomes the obtrusive mischief-maker” who cannot endure quiet. Instead of fostering the personal development of themselves and others, they hinder and paralyze it. She says, “The dominating will replaces joyful services. How many unhappy marriages can be attributed to this abnormality! How much alienation between mothers and growing children and even mature offspring!”⁹³

An example in C. S. Lewis’ *The Four Loves* sheds light on Stein’s thoughts. Mrs. Fidget needs to feel needed. Her “gift” of affection makes demands on her family and nearly destroys them. Lewis offers a few examples of how Mrs. Fidget “lived for her family” in an excessive and exaggerated way:

There was always a hot lunch for anyone who was at home and always a hot meal at night (even in midsummer). They implored her not to provide this. They protested almost with tears in their eyes (and with truth) that they liked cold meals. It made no difference. She was living for her family. She always sat up to “welcome” you home if you were out late at night; two or three in the morning, it made no odds; you would always find the frail, pale, weary face awaiting you like a silent accusation. Which meant of course that you couldn’t with any decency go out very often.

Mrs. Fidget very often said that she lived for her family. And it was not untrue. Everyone in the neighborhood knew it. “She lives for her family,” they said; “what a wife and mother!” . . . For Mrs. Fidget, as she so often said, would “work her fin-

⁹² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

gers to the bone” for her family. They couldn’t stop her. Nor could they—being decent people—quietly sit still and watch her do it. They had to help. Indeed they were always having to help. That is, they did things for her to help her do things for them which they didn’t want done. . . . The Vicar says Mrs. Fidget is now at rest. Let us hope she is. What’s quite certain is that her family are.⁹⁴

Mrs. Fidget’s “motherliness” was not motherly at all, but a burden to her family; it stole their peace and joy. The perversion of her personal outlook and active sympathy made her grasp beyond her family’s need. Her maternal embrace turned into a maternal suffocation.

To avoid the Mrs. Fidget syndrome, women need to cultivate the feminine qualities of expansiveness, quietness, warmth, self-containment, self-emptiness, and self-control in their hearts. Expansiveness, woman’s natural inclination to direct her interest to people and human relations, can easily turn into a mere curiosity about people and their circumstances without the proper formation.⁹⁵ Stein proposes quietude and warmth as the check and balance for expansiveness. The qualities of quietude and warmth make woman a welcoming refuge of peace for others. Nevertheless, without self-emptiness⁹⁶ and self-control, quietude and warmth quickly fall into a state of worried commotion, or, worse yet, selfish coldness.⁹⁷ For the qualities of expansiveness, quietness, warmth, self-containment, self-emptiness, and self-control to take root

⁹⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York, Harcourt, 1960), 50.

⁹⁵ “If this instinct is simply indulged in, then nothing is won either for the soul itself or for other souls. It goes out of itself, so to speak, and remains standing outside of itself. It loses itself, without giving anything to others.” Stein, *Woman*, 133.

⁹⁶ In reference to the spiritual quality of self-emptiness, Stein offers this German prayer, “O Lord God, take me away from myself and give me completely to you alone.” *Ibid.*, 134.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

in their souls, women must become mistresses of their interior castle,⁹⁸ i.e. their hearts. By purifying their hearts from unhealthy desires, women gain self-mastery and powerfully express their *feminine genius* in all of their relationships. Her heart, when directed by love, will allow her to discern and meet the needs of others in the most empathetic, sensitive, intuitive, and motherly way possible.

Due to woman's natural vocation as spouse and mother, the soul, with the heart at the center, experiences a unique intimacy with the body. Stein explains, "The mysterious process of the formation of a new creature in the maternal organism represents such an intimate unity of the physical and the spiritual that one is well able to understand that this unity imposes itself on the entire nature."⁹⁹ She warns that due to this intimacy of soul and body, woman's spiritual powers can easily degenerate if her body exerts unrestrained reign over her soul.¹⁰⁰ The meaningful inward fashioning of a woman's heart depends on the soul impregnating the body with its life, i.e. the spiritualization of the body.¹⁰¹ St. Paul elucidates what Stein means by the spiritualization of the body:

⁹⁸ St. Teresa of Avila uses the image of the castle in her vision of the soul as a diamond in the shape of a castle containing seven mansions, which she interpreted as the journey of faith through seven stages, ending in union with God. Stein here is concerned with the ideal image of the gestalt of the feminine soul and uses the interior castle to illustrate the innermost core of the woman. The influence of St. Teresa of Avila is expected of any Carmelite. However, for Stein, the great saint captured her attention even before her conversion to Catholicism. In fact, Stein attributes her conversion to her reading of St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography. She read St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography in one sitting and, upon finishing it, said, "This is truth." Oben, *Edith Stein*, 17.

⁹⁹ Stein, *Woman*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* As per the spiritualization of the body, that is, its transformation from corruptible to incorruptible, from earthly to heavenly and, by implication, from a passionate burden to a glorious vehicle, St. Paul mentions its regal role as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the future reality of the glorification of the body through the glorification of the dead. In this life, one can have a foretaste of this glory through participating in the

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another. . . . Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.¹⁰²

The inward fashioning of the heart, which involves the correct order between the soul and the body,¹⁰³ requires the casting out of jealousy and envy, outbursts of anger, disputes and dissensions, etc., in order to make room for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Stein, like St. Paul, makes a distinction between fallen nature and unfallen nature,¹⁰⁴ and warns

virtues and by living “in the Spirit.” Cf. 1 Corinthians 19:20, 1 Corinthians 15:42–49, and Philippians 3:21.

¹⁰² Galatians 5:13–24. Commenting on St. Paul’s teachings on what it means for the soul to spiritualize the body, John Paul II explains that according to St. Paul “man, in whom concupiscence prevails over the spiritual . . . should rise . . . as a spiritual body, [i.e.] man in whom the Spirit will achieve a just supremacy over the body, spirituality over sensuality . . . [for sensuality is] the sum total of the factors limiting human spirituality, that is, as a force that ‘ties down’ the spirit . . . The spiritual body should mean precisely the perfect sensitivity of the senses, their perfect harmonization with the activity of the human spirit in truth and liberty. The animal body, which is the earthly antithesis of the spiritual body, indicates sensuality as a force prejudicial to man, precisely because while living—‘in the knowledge of good and evil’—he is often attracted and impelled toward evil.” John Paul II, “Body’s Spiritualization Will Be Source of Its Power and Incorruptibility,” General Audience of 10 February 1982, § 4, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English (15 February 1982): 9.

¹⁰³ For Stein, the correct order between soul and body is the order as it corresponds to unfallen nature. Stein, *Woman*, 95.

¹⁰⁴ On the fallen state of man, see *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 404.

women about giving in to all their sensual desires.¹⁰⁵ She encourages women to practice self-mastery by bringing their body under the guidance of their soul.¹⁰⁶

In the next section we will consider why the full expression of the *feminine genius* depends on the total transformation of women into whole, balanced, mature, and emotionally attuned people capable of not just operating in the world but of gifting themselves to persons in an all-embracing and healing way. We will specifically discuss Stein's method of the emotional formation as the key to unlocking the *feminine genius*.

¹⁰⁵ “As soon as more physical satisfaction is given to the body . . . demand[ing] more, then it results in a decline of spiritual existence. Instead of controlling and spiritualizing the body, the soul is controlled by it; and the body loses according to its character as a human body. The more intimate the relationship of soul and body is, just so will the danger of spiritual decline be greater. (On the other hand, certainly, there is also the greater possibility here that the soul will spiritualize the body).” Stein, *Woman*, 95.

St. Thomas Aquinas' discussion on temperance in the *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, Q. 141, sheds light on this topic. In this question, Aquinas writes on the importance of subordinating the passions to reason so that physical enjoyment and pleasure might be moderated, i.e. not be excessive nor deficient. He says that “sensible and bodily goods . . . are not in opposition to reason, but are subject to it as instruments which reason employs in order to attain its proper end.” *Ibid.*, II–II, Q. 141, Art. 3.

Stein stays true to Aquinas in many levels. Nevertheless, while for Aquinas, man is a composite of body and soul, which has two faculties, that of the intellect and of the will, Stein—much like Dietrich von Hildebrand—places three faculties in the soul, namely, that of the intellect, the will, and the heart. See Stein, *Woman*, 98, and Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity* (South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ Stein, *Woman*, 94.

**Emotional Formation:
The Key to Unlocking the *Feminine Genius***

*The Necessity of Emotional Health for Women to
Express Their Feminine Genius*

In her article, “Edith Stein’s Understanding of Woman,” Sarah Borden writes, “For Stein, a well-developed heart, that is, a full, affective and emotional life, is absolutely necessary in order to be a healthy, flourishing human being”¹⁰⁷ that will accurately understand the world and have the right emotional responses to the world.¹⁰⁸ One of the most essential qualities of a spiritual mother and a spiritual companion is to have a healthy emotional life; without this women cannot fully express their *feminine genius*. Stein’s method of emotional formation helps women set their priorities straight by teaching them how to make correct value judgement.

The question that remains is: what is the correct hierarchy of values? Moreover, why is its proper ordering intimately related to the *feminine genius*?

John Paul II sheds light here; it is Catholic social teaching¹⁰⁹ which reveals the proper hierarchy of values. The seven principles of Catholic social teaching order values in their proper hierarchy by promoting the human person, the family, the individual’s right to own property, the dignity of work and workers, and the pursuit of peace and

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Borden, “Edith Stein’s Understanding of Woman,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2006): 179.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ For an overview of Catholic Social Teaching from Pope Leo XIII’s charter of Catholic social thought *Rerum Novarum*, through Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* and Pope John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus*, to the second part of Pope Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est*, and to Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*, see Roger Charles, S.J., *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000).

care for the poor.¹¹⁰ The first and fundamental value that needs to be upheld is the right to life.¹¹¹ Women, stamped with the seal for motherhood, are uniquely designed to recognize values in their proper hierarchy, namely, because they are the first to recognize the value and dignity of life. Therefore, they have an indispensable and irreplaceable role and responsibility to protect the right to life, the principal value on which the hierarchy of values stands.

Women learn to recognize values in their proper hierarchy through emotional formation. Emotional formation is not taught through formal education, although the emotional formation of women can be enriched and assisted by a traditional education that takes feminine needs into account.¹¹² Instead, emotional formation is taught by environmental experiences and personal interactions, underscoring the importance for women and surrounding themselves with emotionally mature women living out their spousal and maternal vocations in exemplary ways.¹¹³

This is not to say that women cannot enter into broken environments and interact with women who still need to grow in emotional maturity; in these environments and through these interactions, women can help others heal and develop into whole people by revealing their *feminine genius*.¹¹⁴ However, they cannot help others on their journey if they are not whole themselves. This is why the adoption of an errone-

¹¹⁰ See John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, Encyclical Letter on the Hundreth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, 1 May 1991, available at: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en.html>.

¹¹¹ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, § 11.

¹¹² See Elyse Hayes, "Edith Stein: Her Life and Her Vision of an Educated Catholic Woman," *Catholic Library World* 75, no. 2 (2004): 115–120.

¹¹³ Stein, *Woman*, 102–107.

¹¹⁴ One of the most essential qualities of a spiritual mother and a spiritual companion is to have a healthy emotional life; without this women cannot fully express their *feminine genius*.

ous hierarchy of values is so destructive, as it only leads to further spreading of error.

In a sense, we are products of our environment. If I am always surrounded by people who place a high value in keeping up with the latest trends, and I don't counterbalance these negative interactions with positive ones, then I might eventually adopt an erroneous hierarchy of values. Moreover, it is much harder to undo an erroneous emotional formation received at home as a child.¹¹⁵

For Stein, emotions are not mere subjective feelings.¹¹⁶ The emotions are subjective affective responses to objective values. Emotions are like organs that reveal values through their movements. Women's emotions are influenced by their personal outlook, active sympathy, emotional perception, and intuitive grasp, and serve an epistemic function, namely that of revealing values.¹¹⁷

In her doctoral dissertation, *The Problem of Empathy*, Stein demonstrates how emotions reveal values and their hierarchy. For Stein, there are five types of affective phenomena: (1) sensual feelings, such as pleasure and pain; (2) general feelings, such as feeling tired or alive; (3) moods, such as feeling cheerful or depressed; (4) spiritual feelings, such as feeling happiness, sadness, or aesthetic appreciation; and (5) sentiments, such as gratitude, hatred, or love. Of these five types of affective phenomena, only spiritual feelings and sentiments,

¹¹⁵ "If living with those who are what one should be is the basic and most efficacious factor of human development, then the most essential factor in the formation of pure womanhood must be growing up near a woman who embodies it. And the more who does not embody this fails in her mission. A mother's example is also fundamental . . ." Stein, *Woman*, 215.

¹¹⁶ Ingrid Ferran Vendrell, "Empathy, Emotional Sharing and Feeling in Stein's Early Work," *Human Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 498, DOI: 10.1007/s10746-015-9346-4.

¹¹⁷ See *Ibid.*, 497.

feelings in the proper sense of the word, have an epistemic function and can grasp and disclose values.¹¹⁸

Just like the ears that reveal sounds, the eyes that reveal images, and the tongue that reveals flavors, the emotions reveal values.¹¹⁹ In this sense, emotions are like a special kind of perception that have an epistemic function of disclosing values. Since the emotions reveal what people value, we can learn a lot about ourselves and others by the way we respond emotionally to our environment. Individuals experience emotional responses in reference to a given object, which itself corresponds to the objective hierarchy of values. If people are not properly taught how to make correct value judgments, their emotions can certainly be wrong. Hence, we can be emotionally mature or otherwise. And thus our emotions can be right or wrong, justified or unjustified, rational or irrational, appropriate or inappropriate.

What does it mean for people to have proper emotional responses? Is there such a thing as a wrong emotional response? Ingrid Ferran Vendrell explains,

Each emotion is directed to its corresponding value and each feeling has its own place in the hierarchy of values, or else the appropriateness condition is not satisfied. If in front of something dangerous I react in a reckless way, my emotional reaction is inappropriate because in front of danger I am expected to feel fear. And when we react emotionally to a value, disregarding other values that are more important, we are having an emotionally inappropriate reaction. If emotions are appropriate, however, they show us what has a value and how we should act.¹²⁰

In sum, since values are objective and there is an objective hierarchy of values, we can emotionally react appropriately or inappropriately.

¹¹⁸ See *Ibid.*, 489.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 497.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 498.

ately to a value.¹²¹ The role of emotional formation is to teach women to make correct value judgments.¹²² Thus, emotional formation is an education in forming correct value judgement.

In the following subsection, I will offer a literary analysis of Mary Lennox's emotional transformation in the *Secret Garden*. Mary Lennox's example will show why emotional health is necessary for women to express their *feminine genius* as well as provide a concrete explanation of emotional formation and value judgments.¹²³

A Young Woman's Journey in Emotional Formation

In the *Secret Garden*, Mary Lennox's transformation, which involved rooting out the weeds of negativity and selfishness and watering the seeds of positivity and kindness, provides a perfect depiction of what Stein means by emotional formation and why it is the key to unlocking the *feminine genius*. Mary Lennox's story offers a concrete example of how a woman's environment and relationships can assist or thwart her emotional formation.

In the beginning of the story, Mary is portrayed as a self-absorbed girl, who is prone to anger and who values her own comfort above all.¹²⁴ It is safe to say that Mary did not value anyone or anything outside of what promoted her comfort. As the story progresses, we learn about Mary's environment and her relationships. Mary was unloved by her parents and caretakers. While her caretakers were scared of Mistress Mary, her own mother was embarrassed by her daughter's

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² For example, if I am overcome with intense anger when my son tips my coffee mug over my favorite dress, this reveals how I value this dress in an inappropriate and wrong way.

¹²³ To see how Stein used literary examples in her own teaching, see Stein, *Woman*, 88–94.

¹²⁴ Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, 7 and 12.

appearance.¹²⁵ Early on in the story, we learn that Mary did not know how to judge values in their proper hierarchy precisely because she did not have a mother or any other woman to model emotional maturity.

When Mary is made an orphan by the cholera outbreak,¹²⁶ she is sent to live with an uncle she has never met, Mr. Archibald Craven.¹²⁷ It seems that her environment and relationships are going to be much the same: a mansion with impersonal caretakers.¹²⁸ However, the experiences Mary has in this new environment and the relationships she builds at Misselthwaite Manor could not be any more different than her life in India. The healing of Mary's heart and the emotional formation she receives begin with her interactions with Martha Sowerby, her new caretaker. Unlike her Ayah, Martha treated Mary in a strikingly casual way, like she would to her own sister.¹²⁹ Martha encouraged Mary to go outside and play; it was these outdoor adventures that gave her the physical and spiritual healing she needed and led her to finding the key to the secret garden. Martha's mother, Susan Sowerby, also played a key role in Mary's healing; one could even say that Mrs. Sowerby received the orphan as her spiritual daughter.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Her mother "had not wanted a little girl at all . . . When Mary was born, she handed her over to the care of an Ayah, who was made to understand that if she wished to please [her], she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible." *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹²⁸ "It's a grand big place in a gloomy way . . ." *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁹ "Mary listened to her with a grave, puzzled expression. The native servants she had been used to in India were not in the least like this. They were obsequious and servile and did not presume to talk to their master as if they were equals. They made salaams and called them 'protector of the poor' and names of that sort . . . Mary had always slapped her Ayah in the face when she was angry. She wondered a little what this girl would do if she slapped her in the face . . . Mary wondered if she might not even slap back—if the person who slapped her was only a little girl." *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³⁰ "Your mother is a kind woman." Susan even gifted Mary a jump rope, which made the little girl feel very special. *Ibid.*, 60.

Mary's journey in emotional formation invited and challenged her to reorder her values in their proper hierarchy. In this way, she was able to achieve emotional maturity and build loving relationships. Moreover, she was able to help her cousin, who shared a very similar upbringing with her, to heal and, eventually, be able to reconcile with his father, Archibald Craven.¹³¹ Mary, in this sense, by undergoing emotional formation in a wholesome environment with authentic women, was able to be a spiritual mother and spiritual companion herself.¹³² Women who have undergone emotional formation have the responsibility to, like Martha and Susan, be spiritual mothers to other women.

Conclusion

Through spiritual motherhood, emotionally mature women can teach other women how to cultivate a wholesome environment in their home, parish, office, etc., and, most importantly, how to be a healing presence themselves. The healing presence of a spiritual mother is aided by her personal outlook, active sympathy, intuitive grasp, and emotional perception. The life of our Blessed Mother, the highest expression of the *feminine genius*, offers a concrete picture of what a wholesome environment and authentic woman look like. As well, the life of Edith Stein, and her own imitation of our Blessed Mother, invites all women to contemplate Nazareth, the hidden life of the Holy Family, and specifically, Mary as wife and mother.



¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹³² The spousal and maternal vocation of women does not have a minimum age requirement. In the history of the Church, we see spiritual motherhood and spiritual companionship lived out in the most profound ways by girl saints.

THE FEMININE GENIUS ACCORDING TO EDITH STEIN

SUMMARY

The term *feminine genius* denotes a special intuition and sensitivity of a woman that helps her not only ascertain the needs of others but also empathize with the human condition in a way characteristic only of women. The article attempts to answer questions concerning the *feminine genius*, such as the following: What is spiritual motherhood? What is spiritual companionship? How can women express the qualities of companionship and motherhood in and out of their homes? What kind of obstacles do women need to root out of their hearts to build loving relationships? And, How does emotional formation prepare women for their vocation? The answers are sought from Edith Stein's perspective, i.e. by drawing from the usage of phenomenology and Thomism adopted in her book, *Essays on Women*.

KEYWORDS

woman, *feminine genius*, Edith Stein, culture, society, mother, wife, family, husband, children, vocation, spiritual motherhood, spiritual companionship, feminism, working woman, religious woman, love, God, self-gift, relationship, emotional formation, value, phenomenology, Thomism.

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