

New Feminism Offered by New Evangelization Conclusions of International Congress Held in Rome

ROME, MAY 22, 00 (ZENIT.org).- From May 20-21 the Pontifical Athenaeum "Regina Apostolorum" brought together a number of men and women from various parts of the world to discern the new directions that must be adopted by Christians over the next few decades in support of women, which on May 20 John Paul II himself referred to as a "new feminism."

In her address, Lucienne Salle of the Pontifical Council for the Laity emphasized that the great novelty of the "new feminism" in contrast to the old, is the absence of a spirit of rebellion and confrontation. Instead, it is based on a genuine will to construct and respond to women's expectations.

During the Congress, some wondered why the term "feminism" should still be used. Mary Ann Glendon, president of the Congress, who represented John Paul II at the 1995 U.N. World Conference on Woman in Beijing, said that the reply to this objection can be found in St. Paul himself, who became a Jew when evangelizing Jews, weak when evangelizing the weak; in other words, the "new feminism," is a proposal directed especially to the old feminists.

Glendon placed "new feminism" in the context of the new evangelization launched by John Paul II's pontificate. Specifically, the "new feminism" must be a privileged proposal to defend the dignity of woman in all its dimensions, just as is true with human life in general, especially in regard to the weakest.

Feminism and "New Feminism" Lucienne Salle said that feminism had been "an important force to develop opportunities for formation and action on the part of women," but at present, it does not meet expectations, as it places women in confrontation with the love of their husbands and attention to their children. The vast majority of women, she added, want to be wives and mothers.

Daughter, Wife and Mother Jo Croissant, wife of the founder of the new Community of the Beatitudes, said that the Bible offers unexpected horizons for women. "One of the errors of feminists' claims was to place woman's liberation strictly in her relation to man, and offering as the only alternative either submission to him or domination of him. The only way not to engage in this relation of strength is to posit the right manner of relating to man, that is, by establishing the relation of woman with God."

Croissant added, "God's tender glance at us reconciles us with ourselves and restores his image in us." In order for a woman to rediscover her profound identity as woman, she must make her own the journey of discovery as a "daughter of God," then "spouse," and finally "mother."

The first step is to rediscover herself as daughter of God. "This filiation is the only one that can free us of all our complexes and lead us to act without depending on our old wounds, resulting in being genuinely free," according to Croissant.

"Woman's dignity is intimately linked to the love she receives because of her femininity and, in addition, the love that she herself gives." It is that dimension of spouse that is not always easy to discover, continued the French speaker. "It is natural to understand that she is both daughter and mother, in other words, a relation in which we find ourselves above or below another. But it is much more complicated to be before the other, without fear, without shame, with an awareness of knowing who you are, without feeling threatened or crushed, and without crushing the other. The fulfillment of man, as of woman, consists in being able to be a spouse, to rediscover the face to face, the condition for a correct relation, unselfish, fulfilling, fruitful."

In being fully a wife, a woman becomes fully mother, Croissant explained. "There is no motherhood without marriage, without union in the gift of self and the acceptance of the other. To be able to carry a child in your own womb, participating in such an intimate way in Creation, giving your own flesh and blood is an extraordinary grace given to woman. All her being is conceived in terms of her vocation to motherhood." In imposing male models on women, the result is "gravely amputating in woman the most unconscious dimensions of her being."

Possibilities for "New Feminism" Croissant proposed that women rediscover their identity in what John Paul II said in number 46 of his encyclical "Redemptoris Mater": "It can be said that, in looking at Mary woman finds in her the secret to live her femininity worthily and to achieve her real development. In Mary's light, the Church reads in the face of woman the reflections of a beauty that is a mirror of the highest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the total sacrifice of love, the strength that can accept the greatest sorrows, limitless fidelity, tireless industry, and the ability to integrate a penetrating intuition with the word of support and appreciation."

Only in this way, Croissant concluded, will woman "not be under the domination of man, but will be like him. The union of the two will have a fruitfulness that will give rise to a Pentecost of love throughout the world."

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