

REPORT ON

Pax Romana meeting for Women Students, on

"WOMAN IN THE MODERN WORLD"

held between Monday, April 6th, and Monday, April 13th, 1959, at the Convent of the Holy Child, 11 Cavendish Square, London W.1, England.

The meeting was attended by delegates from France, Holland, North America, W. Germany and England, as well as several casual observers -- about twenty-five persons in all. Miss Ingrid Tauber of the Union of Catholic Students of Great Britain organized the meeting. The speakers were:-

- Miss Hilda Graef, philosopher and author, on "Woman: An Approach Through Genesis".
- Reverend M. O'Leary, Chairman of the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council, on "Woman: Physiological and Psychological Aspects". and also on "Woman in the Family".
- Reverend J. Fitzsimons, former Young Catholic Workers Women's Chaplain, on "Woman: Historical Context".
- Reverend William Lawson, S.J., author, on "The Apostolate".
- Dr. Jean Barron of King's College, London University, on "Woman in the University".
- Miss Patricia Hall, Business Management Consultant, on "Woman in Business and Professions".

The registered delegates lived together at the Convent, and were thus able to enjoy Mass and meals together. On each of three days there was a morning lecture, followed by discussion in small groups and then in general assembly. On April 10th there were three short talks instead of one lecture, the closing session occurred on April 11th, and the 12th was spent on an excursion to Windsor Castle. Evenings were free and the participants sampled London theatres and landmarks.

It is regrettable that no delegates represented Oriental countries or those behind the Iron Curtain. Women in both these regions are in situations, have problems and philosophies, entirely different from those to be found in the West, and the London meeting would certainly have been greatly enriched by discussions on a truly universal scale. However, it is also possible that in such a case the subject matter would have been too vast and conclusions difficult to attain. Nonetheless, we ask our readers to keep in mind the fact that the framework of the meeting was Occidental, and that the Conclusions, while based on universal truths, are seen in the light of Western Culture and Thought.

As can be seen by the lecture topics, the subject was dealt with from almost all possible aspects, and in an informal way because of the intimacy of a small group. Therefore, rather than a series of formal conclusions, we offer the following report of the overall content of the Conference, as written by one of the participants.

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In the Book of Genesis it is written that "The Lord God said: It is not well that man should be without companionship; I will give him a mate of his own kind".

Woman was, therefore, created as a companion to Man. This status implies that she exists for him, as a complementary partner; it implies the incompleteness of each without the other. In the Garden of Eden, Man dominated the Earth with Woman as his devoted and respected companion: equal, different, complementary beings. The Fall changed this relation: "The Lord God said ... to the woman ... Thou shalt be subject to thy husband; he shall be thy lord". Woman's status fell to one of inferiority and servility; Our Lady won back the dignity of womankind when she became the Mother of God, and the coming of Christianity was marked by a re-affirmation of Woman's equality with Man. However, respect for Woman did not result in legal rights -- it was not Christianity which led to her gaining such rights, but the Industrial Revolution of the last hundred years.

At the beginning of this new era it was a mark of prestige for women to be idle, but eventually many of them had to take up work; and feminists and suffragettes fought for legal rights, for legal equality with the men beside whom they worked. In winning rights they lost privileges, however. In struggling to compete with men, to meet the standards of a Man's world, they lost their femininity and the respect of men, in many instances. It might be said that we have completed a full circle, and returned to the state of equality which God created in the beginning. But the fact is that now there is competition whereas then there was companionship.

Man, by Science, has greater power over material things than ever since the Fall, but Woman's status, if frankly viewed in general, is dominated by two attitudes in Society: she is regarded as merely a sexual being, or as quite equal to Man, legally. The sexual attitude results in male-centered Society; the other finds Woman a competitor in a Man's world. And both of these frustrate her nature, for male-centeredness denies the undeniable fact that men still look to women for inspiration and comfort, and indiscriminate equalization of men and women can never erase physical and psychological differences which mark women as inferior, when judged by prevalent male standards.

The suffragettes who insisted that Woman has capacities equal to those of Man overlooked the facts of History -- that there has never been a female da Vinci, Napoleon or Chopin. Woman definitely lacks the creative factor of Man's mind; it is useless to insist that she possesses it when womankind (the sex which is known for getting what it wants) cannot boast of creative genius in its ranks. Only one woman stands with all the Doctors of the Church, for example, and women with authority, such as Catherine of Russia and Catherine de Medici can hardly be said to have displayed any creative genius in their management of things. In seeking examples of great women of the scientific era, one finds only the name of Madame Curie at hand.

The suffragettes overlooked, too, the type of influence which causes History to remember Cleopatra, St. Elizabeth, Madame Pompadour and Lady Churchill. They ignored the marvelous implications of the truism that "Behind every great man there is a great woman", be it a mother, sister, wife or daughter. They denied the subtlety and spirituality, the inspiration essential to Woman's rôle -- things which cannot be measured in terms of work and action -- in favor of cut-and-dried legal and physical equality.

It is true that Woman was made for Man, that God was incarnate as a man. But it was the humble "Fiat" of a woman -- not passiveness, but 'active submission'-- which led to the Redemption of Mankind. It was a Mother which Christ left to St. John the symbol of Mankind; it is still Woman who sets the tone of Society, bearing its members, nourishing their souls, minds and bodies -- and if she does not, so much the worse for Society.

A new sort of feminism is appearing today -- women in America are asking their menfolk to take back the superiority which they lost to the generation of suffragettes; women in England are meeting to study the distinctive marks of womanhood, of femininity; women in France -- well, it must be admitted that they have always enjoyed being women. Behind the Iron Curtain there is an incredible tragedy being played: women are completely defeminized by amoral Communism which overrides even differences of sex; as their hands and backs are toughened by laboring beside men, so their souls are starved of any delicacy and spirituality. But that tragedy is only one aspect of the horror which is the entire Communist system. The recent upsurge of religion in Russia shows that women there are struggling to resolve the situation, but its happy outcome depends on means other than those which should be employed in the West.

The strained relations within Society in the free world can be corrected -- by simple recognition of facts as well as by Education. The differences and attributes of manhood and womanhood must be understood. Man's strength lies in 'doing'; Woman's, in 'being'. He is more logical, she is more reasonable. She is sensually more perceptive than he and reaches her decisions by more rapid co-ordination of facts and by intuition; he reaches the same decisions by careful weighing of details and by logic. Man is literal -- he says just what he means; Woman says what she wants to say -- and doesn't disclose her reasons. Women DO talk more than men, undeniably, but if God had not made it natural for Woman to keep up a flow of words, to repeat herself effortlessly, children would take rather longer to learn to speak: an example of masculine monosyllables and grunts would hardly provide sufficient instruction !

But a simple recognition of age-old facts does not mean that we must return to standards of "good old days". The existing situation of Woman is not all bad; it lacks balance. It is through Education that the present lack of balance can be resolved (platitudes remain nonetheless true).

Mothers must be mothers, and teach their daughters to be feminine; schools must educate girls to be women -- present systems have merely admitted women to Education adjusted to male standards; women must be proud of their Nature and aware of its implications -- its responsibilities and its dignity. Integrity wins respect and privileges of itself. The suffragettes went about things in quite the wrong way, for they forgot that Woman's rôle is intended to be complementary to that of Man. As always in the family so now in society, in business, in almost every field of human endeavor, the successful women are those who work as women.

There is no question of going back to the days when Woman's world implied Church, Children and Cooking, and no more. Progress has invaded her home; the world comes to her through radio, television, newspapers. To fulfil any vocation in modern times, Woman must know the world in general; and note that an 'ordinary' housewife' is still a complex of cook, doctor, economist, jurist, teacher, washerwoman, entertainer and now, 'glamor girl'. But women cannot sacrifice their homes or their Nature in favor of the 'new world'. The men who make the modern world still need to return to homes where Time and mechanization are forgotten, to homes where what matters is 'being' and where human Nature is as free as it ever was to "grow in Wisdom and in Grace".

The true greatness of Woman lies in her Nature's essence of motherhood -- in her capacity for giving, inspiring, nourishing, helping. It is interesting to note that novelists usually present Woman as a bad influence, while poets sing her spiritual praises -- the difference between what often is and what, ideally, should be. It is only by a recognition of the sublimity of her rôle of motherhood -- both spiritual and physical -- that Woman can be what she should be.

The perfect example of this rôle has been before us for almost two thousand years: Our Lady combines in her motherhood of Christ and of all men the humility and independence, the passivity and initiative, the obedience and leadership which make up the complex being which every woman is; -- "The Handmaid of the Lord", to whom Mankind turns for instruction.

APPENDIX

Delegates registered at the 1959 Pax Romana Women Students' Meeting:

Rev. Sister Bozena, CSFN
52 Lordon Road
Enfield, Middlesex
ENGLAND

Rev. Sister M. Dolores, OSU, Fh. D.
Ursuline Convent
Brentwood, Essex
ENGLAND

Miss Anneke van Rhijn
Koninginneweg 29
Hilversum
HOLLAND

Miss Adrienne Cremer
Hooglandse Kerkgracht 29
Leiden
HOLLAND

Miss Titia van Rijckevorsel
Javastraat 96
Nijmegen
HOLLAND

Miss Danielle Savarit
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Paris Ve,
FRANCE

Miss Mechtilde Kühn
Dorotheenstrasse 15
Bonn
GERMANY

Dr. Hildegard Starp
Hedwigstrasse 11
Münster
GERMANY

Miss Ingrid Tauber
Convent of the Holy Child
11 Cavendish Square
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ENGLAND

Miss Rosario Carry
Convent of the Holy Child
11 Cavendish Square
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ENGLAND

Miss Evva Jarmicki
Pax Romana General Secretariat
14 rue St. Michel
Fribourg
SWITZERLAND

DEPENSESA.- SEMINAIRE AFRICAIN:

1. Propagande, affiches, documentation	Fr.s.	2.260.90
2. Voyages à Ghana	Fr.s.	31.708.60
3. Séjours	Fr.s.	4.271.85
4. Visas, vaccins	Fr.s.	202.40

B.- Etudiants africains en Europe:

1. M. Edward ULZEN, de Ghana	Fr.s.	420.95
2. M. Cleto RIAL, du Soudan (partiel)	Fr.s.	120.-

C. AFRICAN NEWSLETTER:

1. Achat d'une machine à écrire	Fr.s.	250.-
2. Impression	Fr.s.	286.-

D. Frais divers: télégrammes Fr.s. 97.70E. RESERVE:

1. Publication du rapport Séminaire Africain	Fr.s.	5.000.-
2. Participation d'Africains aux réunions 1958	Fr.s.	2.000.-
3. Voyages, séjour, M. Cleto RIAL (solde)	Fr.s.	4.000.-
4. Secrétaire Africain au secrétariat (partiel)	Fr.s.	4.699.98
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