

Women’s genius according to St. John Paul II*

Geniusz kobiety według Świętego Jana Pawła II

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Abstract: The original term the ‘woman’s genius’ by St. John Paul II, contained in the letter *Mulieris dignitatem* and his other documents, accurately defines spirituality and the proper role of women in the Church and society. It can be a hermeneutical key when studying the figures of saints and outstanding women, including the Servant of God, Jadwiga Zamoyska. As the participation of women in the triple mission of Christ: priestly, prophetic and kingly, the ‘woman’s genius’ manifests itself in various ways. We find its fullness in Mary.

Keywords: woman’s genius; spirituality; feminism; John Paul II; Jadwiga Zamoyska

Abstrakt: Oryginalne określenie „geniusz kobiety” autorstwa św. Jana Pawła II, zawarte w liście *Mulieris dignitatem* i innych jego dokumentach, trafnie określa duchowość oraz właściwą rolę kobiety w Kościele i społeczeństwie. Może ono stanowić klucz hermeneutyczny przy badaniu postaci świętych i wybitnych kobiet, także Służebnicy Bożej Jadwigi Zamoyskiej. Jako udział w potrójnym posłannictwie Chrystusa: kapłańskim, prorockim i królewskim, „geniusz kobiety” przejawia się na różne sposoby. Jego pełnię odkrywamy w Maryi.

Słowa kluczowe: geniusz kobiety; duchowość; feminizm; Jan Paweł II; Jadwiga Zamoyska

Introduction

Authors dealing with the life and teaching of St. John Paul II, and especially publicists, often call him ‘the prophet of our times’. This seems fully justified as

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the holy Pope was able not only to accurately assess reality in the light of faith and reason, but also to foresee the consequences of processes and phenomena of which he was a careful observer.

One of these phenomena is contemporary aggressive feminism and the ubiquitous *gender* ideology¹. Anticipating these phenomena by almost four decades, i.e. almost two generations, St. John Paul II was the first Pope in history to directly address the topic of the new Christian feminism, recognizing the special role of women in society and the Church. Although his predecessors did not avoid the topic of women's social roles, they raised it marginally, and at the same time usually in the context of the person of Mary, motherhood and family life, or caring for life in general. Meanwhile, the Polish Pope devoted two special documents to this issue: the apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* on the occasion of the Marian Year on the dignity and vocation of women (dated August 15, 1988) and a letter to women for the IV World Conference on Women in Beijing entitled *A ciascuna di voi* (29 June 1995). In addition, his various documents and enunciations contain numerous statements about the identity of women, their spirituality and their important role in the Church and society. However, the original concept of the 'woman's genius' deserves special attention².

Both this term and the papal new feminism aroused great interest among theologians and journalists of various options and they are still the subject of studies³. The very expression 'feminine genius' may be a hermeneutic key for evaluating contemporary philosophical, cultural and ideological currents that strongly influence not only society, but also the life of the Church, pastoral care and theological thought.

The unique character of the Servant of God Jadwiga Zamoyska allows us to better understand what is the 'woman's genius' according to St. John Paul II and in what sense it culminates in the person of Mary.

1. The 'woman's genius' in papal documents

The term under consideration here has no precedent in Christian literature and theology. It is the original conceptual creation of St. John Paul II. It is worth

¹ See J. Bujak, „Mężczyzną i niewiastą stworzył ich?”. *Współczesny feminizm w poszukiwaniu tożsamości kobiety*, Szczecin 2014; M.A. Peeters, *Gender – światowa norma polityczna i kulturowa. Narzędzie rozeznania*, Warszawa 2013.

² See A. Sorkowicz, *Geniusz kobiety — kilka słów o feminizmie Jana Pawła II*, in: *Rodzina — w świetle zagrożeń realizacji dotychczasowych funkcji. Szkice monograficzne*, eds. W. Korzeniowska, A. Murzyn, U. Szuścik, Katowice 2007, pp. 18–26.

³ Attention should be paid to a collection of post-conference materials entitled *Mulieris dignitas. Promieniowanie kobiecości*, ed. T. Paszkowska, Lublin 2009.

emphasizing that he used it for the first time in the wording the 'feminine genius' in Poland during the 3rd apostolic journey, when on June 13, 1987 he spoke to female employees of the now defunct 'Uniontext' textile plant in Łódź. At the end of his speech, the Pope assured of prayer through the Mother of God, 'so that Polish life may not lack what is rightly called 'feminine genius', what each of you, each woman, thanks to the endowment of the Creator and Redeemer, can and should contribute to the common good and the common heritage of all Poles'⁴. A little later, mentioning his mother, he used this term for the second time, noting that if he is alive, it is thanks to her 'feminine genius'. Expanding on this thought about motherhood, he added:

It is hard not to think of our mothers when meeting women. This is a 'female genius'. In what is connected with upbringing, a woman is irreplaceable, especially when it comes to raising a child in the first years of his life — she is irreplaceable. My burning desire is that all children around the world, and in particular in my homeland, could be brought up by their own mothers, in their own families, so that there would be no abandoned children, relying on orphanages, which are social institutions, useful but they will not replace the mother, they will not replace the 'women's genius'⁵.

The term appeared again a year later in the aforementioned apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*. In its conclusion, the Pope, writing about the development of knowledge and technology and the resulting push of some people to the margins of social life, and at the same time the disappearance of 'sensitivity to man, to what is essentially human', states that 'above all, our times await the manifestation of that «genius» of a woman which will safeguard sensitivity to man in every situation: because he is human! And because «the greatest is love»' (1 Cor 13:13)⁶. In the final point of this letter, the Church expresses its gratitude 'for all the manifestations of the feminine «genius» throughout history, among all peoples and nations... for all the charisms that the Holy Spirit has given women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories, thanks to their faith, hope and love: thanks for all the fruits of female holiness'⁷.

To the concept of the 'woman's genius' St. John Paul II returned in his documents in the mid-nineties of the 20th century, probably in connection with the

⁴ Jan Paweł II, *Dziela zebrane*, vol. 9: *Homilie i przemówienia z pielgrzymek — Europa*, part. 1: *Polska*, Kraków 2008, p. 407.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

⁶ *Idem*, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem” z okazji Roku Maryjnego o godności i powołaniu kobiety*, no. 30, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/listy/mulieris.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 31.

Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing on September 4–15, 1995.

This term was used by the Pope once in the encyclical *Evangelium vitae* on the value and inviolability of human life (March 25, 1995), where he wrote that

in the work of shaping a new culture conducive to life, women have a unique and perhaps decisive role to play in the sphere of thought and action: they are to become promoters of a ‘new feminism’, which is not tempted to imitate models of ‘masculinism’, but knows how to recognize and express the authentic ‘feminine genius’ in all aspects of social life, working to overcome all forms of discrimination, violence and exploitation (EV No. 99)⁸.

Conversely, in the aforementioned letter to women, *A ciascuna di voi*, he used the term as many as six times. Appreciating the contribution of women in various areas of life, he emphasized their role in shaping interpersonal relationships and stated that ‘society owes the most to the «woman’s genius» precisely in this dimension, which is often realized quietly, in everyday interpersonal relationships, and especially in family life’⁹. Therefore, the participants of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, to whom he addressed this letter, he instructed ‘that the subject of the «woman’s genius» be considered with particular attention, not only to recognize in it traces of God’s plan, which should be accepted with respect, but also to give it more space in social and ecclesial life’¹⁰. Mentioning the letter *Mulieris dignitatem* issued on the occasion of the Marian Year, the Pope noted that ‘the Church sees the fullest expression of the «feminine genius» in Mary and finds in her a source of constant inspiration’¹¹. Pointing to the servile attitude of Mary, who called herself ‘the handmaid of the Lord’ (cf. Lk 1:38), St. John Paul II stated that ‘in this broad context of service, the Church, despite many conditions, throughout its two thousand years of history, has fully come to know the «woman’s genius» thanks to the great figures of women who exerted a significant and beneficial influence on their times’¹². Mentioning here among many holy women, martyrs and mystics, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Ávila, whom his predecessor St. Paul VI conferred the title of Doctor of the Church, the Pope from Poland expressed the hope that ‘surely in the future of the

⁸ Cf. L. Caldecott, „*Dar z siebie*” czyli „*nowy feminizm*” papieża, „*Communio*” 17 (1997), no. 1, pp. 101–115.

⁹ Jan Paweł II, *List do kobiet „A ciascuna di voi” na IV Światową Konferencję o Kobiecie w Pekinie*, no. 9, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/listy/pekin_29061995.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 11.

Church of the third millennium there will be no shortage of new and wonderful examples of the «woman's genius»¹³. Concluding, St. John Paul II postulated that the conference in Beijing should 'show the full truth about women' and 'show the «woman's genius» in a comprehensive way' not only on the example of great and famous women from the past, but also 'those ordinary, simple ones who use their feminine talents for the benefit of others in everyday life'¹⁴.

Nine months later, the Pope issued the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata* on consecrated life and its mission in the Church and in the world (March 25, 1996), in which the «feminine genius of» is mentioned twice. There we read about the need for in-depth formation, which 'will help the consecrated woman better understand her own gifts and at the same time revive the necessary mutual exchange of gifts within the Church. Also in the field of theological, cultural and spiritual reflection, we expect a lot from the feminine genius — not only in what concerns the specificity of women's consecrated life, but also in understanding faith in all its manifestations'¹⁵. To confirm these words, the Pope cites verbatim the words from the encyclical *Evangelium vitae* quoted above and states that women have a unique and decisive role to play, becoming 'promoters of the «new feminism»' and at the same time showing the 'authentic female genius' in all the manifestations of social life¹⁶.

An illustration of the above papal thesis is St. Thérèse of Lisieux, about whom St. John Paul II in the apostolic letter *Divini amoris scientia*, published on October 19, 1997 on the occasion of proclaiming her a Doctor of the Church, wrote that 'she is a woman who was able to find hidden riches in the Gospel, showing at the same time concreteness typical of the female genius and the ability to respond to them with the language of life and wisdom'¹⁷.

At the same time, on May 10, 1997, the Pope issued a post-synodal apostolic exhortation entitled *Une esperance nouvelle pour le Liban (A new hope for Lebanon)*. Quoting in it a fragment of the letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, which talks about the moral strength of a woman, thanks to which God entrusts to her the care of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., no. 12; cf. J. Balicki, *Spór o rolę i miejsce kobiety w rodzinie i społeczeństwie — IV Międzynarodowa Konferencja nt. Kobiet w Pekinie*, „Studia Gdańskie” 10 (1995), pp. 81–111.

¹⁵ Jan Paweł II, *Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska „Vita consecrata” o życiu konsekrowanym i jego misji w Kościele i w świecie*, no. 58, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Idem, *List apostolski „Divini amoris scientia” wydany z okazji ogłoszenia Doktorem Kościoła Powszechnego św. Teresy od Dzieciątka Jezus i Najświętszego Oblicza*, no. 11, <https://www.zyciezakonne.pl/dokumenty/kosciol/jan-pawel-ii/jan-pawel-ii-listy-i-przeslania/1997-10-19-watykan-list-apostolski-divini-amoris-scientia-wydany-z-okazji-ogloszenia-sw-teresy-od-dzieciatka-jezus-i-najswietszego-oblicza-doktorem-kosciola-powszechnego-22440/> [accessed: 20.04.2023].

every human being, he stated that ‘women have an acute awareness of what is entrusted to them and have the ability to manifest their «genius» in various circumstances of human life’¹⁸.

It is also worth noting that St. John Paul II wrote about the ‘woman’s genius’ in the context of her contribution to the ecclesial, cultural, social and economic life in the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (January 22, 1999). In it, he emphasized that ‘without this contribution, certain riches would be lacking that only the «feminine genius» can bring to the life of the Church and society itself. Not recognizing it would mean a historical injustice, especially in America, where the contribution of women to the material and cultural development of the continent, as well as to the transmission and preservation of the faith, must not be forgotten’¹⁹.

Typical of our Pope, the term the ‘woman’s genius’ later did not appear in his documents. He also rarely used it in his statements afterwards, although the subject of women was always in the centre of his attention. Nowhere did St. John Paul II give a direct definition of this concept, however, the contents of the letter *Mulieris dignitatem* and the quotes from various documents cited above allow us to reconstruct the meaning of the term the ‘woman’s genius’ mainly by pointing to its manifestations. Moreover, it is a fundamental trait of woman’s spirituality²⁰.

2. Manifestations of the ‘woman’s genius’

What this ‘female genius’ really is and how it manifests itself, St. John Paul II explains most extensively in the basic document, which is the letter *Mulieris dignitatem*. In a typical way, he places all the issues on the ground of personalism and Christocentrism, using the phenomenological-descriptive method typical of him²¹, which usually precedes or intertwines with theological analysis, as is the case here.

The Pope takes the conciliar constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, of which he was a co-author, as his starting point, and states that ‘Christ [...] fully reveals man to

¹⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska „Une esperance nouvelle pour le Liban” o Libanie i jego przygotowaniu do Roku 2000*, no. 50, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19970510_lebanon.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

¹⁹ Idem, *Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska „Ecclesia in America” o spotkaniu z żywym Chrystusem, drogą nawrócenia, jedności i solidarności w Ameryce*, no. 45, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_22011999_ecclesia-in-america.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

²⁰ Cf. H. Wejman, *Duchowość kobiety według zamysłu Bożego*, „Polonia Sacra” 11 (2007), pp. 147–166.

²¹ Cf. M. Chmielewski, *Duchowość według Jana Pawła II. Studium na podstawie encyklik i adhortacji*, Lublin 2013, pp. 26–33.

man himself and shows him his highest calling'²². He directly relates this truth to a woman as in the light of the Gospel, in direct contact with Christ, she regains her dignity and her due social position. This is because His reference to women is 'marked with great clarity and depth'²³. The Pope emphasizes that 'in all Jesus' teaching, as well as in His conduct, nothing is found that would be a manifestation of the handicap of women proper to His time. On the contrary, His words and His actions always express the respect and reverence due to a woman. ... This whole way of talking about and relating to women constitutes a clear «novelty» against the backdrop of the then prevailing custom'²⁴, which aroused astonishment and at times scandalized both the apostles and Jesus' opponents (cf. Mt 26:8 ; Luke 7:39; John 4:27). 'Christ — as the Pope points out — did everything so that [...] women would find in His teaching and in His conduct their own subjectivity and dignity'²⁵. Since the way of Christ's conduct was a consistent opposition to everything that in those times was insulting to the dignity of women, therefore, when they meet Him or are in His vicinity, 'they find themselves in the truth that He «teaches» and «does», even if it is true of their own «sinfulness». They feel «liberated» by this truth, restored to themselves, they feel loved by this «eternal love», love that finds its immediate expression in Christ Himself. Within the scope of Christ's action, their social position changes'²⁶.

On the pages of the Gospel, when women meet Jesus, who, as Pope Francis writes in the letter *Misericordiae vultus* (of April 11, 2015), is 'the face of God's mercy'²⁷, they experience His merciful love (cf. Jn 8:3–11). In this way, they find the fulfilment of the deepest existential need that every human being has, especially a woman. Indeed, as the holy Pope teaches, 'she was called «from the beginning» to be loved and to love'²⁸. Her dignity 'is closely linked to the love she feels due to her very femininity and, at the same time, to the love she in turn bestows'²⁹.

The experience of love, which by its nature is an interpersonal relationship, opens a woman to the divine and human 'you'. It makes her capable of lively

²² Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja duszpasterska o Kościele w świecie współczesnym „Gaudium et spes”*, no. 22, in: idem, *Konstytucje, dekrety, deklaracje*, Poznań 2002, p. 541; cf. Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 2.

²³ Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 12.

²⁴ Ibid., no. 13.

²⁵ Ibid., no. 14.

²⁶ Ibid., no. 15.

²⁷ Franciszek, *List „Misericordiae vultus”*, no. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

²⁸ Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 20.

²⁹ Ibid., no. 30; cf. J. Medina Estévez, *Godność kobiety w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II na podstawie listu apostolskiego „Mulieris dignitatem”*, „Ethos” 8 (1995), no. 1, pp. 31–39.

faith, which in certain situations turns out to be stronger than fear, as evidenced by the presence of women under the Cross of Christ³⁰. Simultaneously, the woman's sensitivity to Christ and His saving message makes her sensitive to man. In this regard, the Pope states that 'the moral strength of a woman, her spiritual strength, is linked to the awareness that God entrusts a man to her in a special way. [...] A woman is strong in her awareness of entrustment, strong in the fact that God «entrusts a man to her» always and everywhere, even in the conditions of social disadvantage in which she may find herself'³¹.

It is precisely this sensitivity of a woman to God and the resulting openness to man, as well as the ability to love and be loved, which God has implanted in her nature, that seem to be the essence of this 'woman's genius' according to St. John Paul II. This property determines her identity and socio-ecclesiastical functions and belongs to every woman, regardless of her social position and whether she is a mother or a virgin. Moreover, the Pope notes that while in the order of nature these two dimensions of a woman's vocation: virginity and motherhood are mutually exclusive, in the spiritual order they are complementary to each other and more fully reflect the richness of the female personality. A particular example of this is Mary, in whom 'these two dimensions of the female vocation met and united in a unique way'³².

The 'woman's genius', understood this way, finds numerous manifestations in the religious and non-religious sphere. As for the first of them, the subject of our interest is primarily the Christian life, which in fact consists in Christofornization, i.e. imitating the attitudes of Jesus Christ³³. An unsurpassed model for women in this respect is Mary as Virgin and Mother.

As the holy Pope teaches in the quoted letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, a woman in the pages of the Gospel and in the entire two-thousand-year history of Christianity, in response to the experienced love of Christ³⁴, shows 'to Him and to all His mystery that special sensitivity which is a characteristic feature of her femininity'³⁵. This is confirmed by the fact that women were the first to come to the tomb on Easter morning (cf. Mk 16:2–5; Lk 24:1). Among them stands out Mary Magdalene, who was called 'the apostle of the apostles' already in antiquity³⁶. With the strength of the experienced love of Christ, a woman is ready to accept the revealed truth with all the spontaneity inherent in her nature. In the Gospels,

³⁰ Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, no. 30.

³² *Ibid.*, no. 17.

³³ Cf. T. Paszkowska, *Chrystofornizacja*, in: *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej*, ed. M. Chmielewski, Lublin–Kraków 2002, pp. 123–124.

³⁴ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*; cf. J 20,1.

therefore, we have numerous examples that 'Christ talks to women about the things of God, finding in them an understanding of these things: a genuine resonance of mind and heart, the response of faith'³⁷.

In this 'response of faith', which engages the intellect and the rich volitional-affective sphere of the woman and dynamizes her entire personality, we find the essential manifestation of this 'genius' on the religious plane. A woman becomes a disciple of Christ, like Mary, sister of Lazarus, who sat at His feet (cf. Lk 10:39), or her sister Martha, who, after the death of her brother Lazarus, talked with Jesus about the resurrection and eternal life (cf. Jn. 11:21–27). In addition, she becomes a 'prophet', as can be seen on the example of the woman from Samaria met by Christ at the well³⁸, who drew almost the entire town to Him.

Engaging the cognitive and affective-volitional spheres, the 'response of faith' that a woman gives to Christ to His call, is clearly manifested in the spiritual life and the need for prayer³⁹ and a more consistent pursuit of holiness, which St. John Paul II understands as 'a high measure of the ordinary Christian life'⁴⁰. Both priests and sociologists of religion observe the almost universal phenomenon that it is women who are usually the first and who in the majority fill churches and devote more time to prayer. Moreover, they show greater religious and moral sensitivity. Thus, we can talk about the meditative dimension of the 'feminine genius'⁴¹.

In pursuing the universal vocation to holiness, recalled by the conciliar constitution *Lumen gentium*⁴², the woman participates in her own way in the three-fold mission of Christ: priestly, prophetic and kingly. The manifestations of her 'genius' should therefore be sought in these three planes, because — as St. John Paul II in one of the catecheses on the Church on June 22, 1994 said — 'women receive a special grace; they receive it in order to live their dignity and mission in covenant with God. They are called to join in their own way — which is an excellent way — the redemptive work of Christ. Women have a great role to play in the Church'⁴³.

³⁷ Idem, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 15.

³⁸ Cf. J 4, 39–42; Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 15.

³⁹ Por. idem, *List apostolski „Novo millennio ineunte” na zakończenie Wielkiego Jubileuszu Roku 2000*, no. 33, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

⁴⁰ Ibid., no. 31.

⁴¹ See M. Chmielewski, *A meditative dimension of woman's genius*, „Soter”. *Journal of Religious Sciences* (Kaunas) 2020, no. 75, pp. 5–13.

⁴² Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele „Lumen gentium”*, no. 39, in: idem, *Konstytucje, dekryty, deklaracje*, p. 141.

⁴³ Jan Paweł II, *Dziela zebrane*, vol. 7: *Katechezy*, part 2, Kraków 2007, p. 663; cf. A. Gąsior, *Maryjna kobieta w kobiecym Kościele*, in: *Maryja w tajemnicy Kościoła. Recepcja i perspektywy*

In the priestly function, whose purpose is the sanctification of the People of God, the ‘genius’ of the believer is revealed in her readiness to give all hardships and sufferings the character of a sacrifice incorporated into the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ⁴⁴. Motherhood and all the effort associated with it are of particular importance here. Also the consecrated woman who, by virtue of her virginity vowed to God, cherishes spiritual motherhood, fulfils herself in loving and being loved in a manner appropriate to her vocation. In addition to the hardships of everyday life and the inevitable suffering that happens to every human being, a special manifestation of the ‘woman’s genius’ is her prayer reaching the heights of contemplation.

In terms of the prophetic function, the Christian woman, whether as a spouse and mother or as an unmarried virgin consecrated to God, finds many opportunities for commitment. It consists primarily in recognizing, accepting and transmitting the revealed truth thanks to the aforementioned natural sensitivity to Christ and man. The ‘genius’ of a Christian woman in terms of her prophetic function will therefore be expressed in the ability to bear witness to living faith and direct transmission of revealed truths⁴⁵.

Openness and sensitivity to what is personal, characteristic of a woman, helps a Christian in other forms of transmission of faith, both informal ones, e.g. fraternal admonition and encouragement, and official ones, such as catechetical teaching and upbringing.

Saint John Paul II in his teaching points to various forms of actualization of spiritual motherhood as part of the prophetic function of women, especially consecrated women. These include missionary commitment⁴⁶, works of education and charity, spiritual support and many others.

The female ‘genius’ also finds expression in the royal mission, which consists mainly in imbuing culture with moral values⁴⁷. Saint John Paul II calls

nauki soborowej, Biblioteka Mariologiczna, 16, ed. A. Gąsior, J. Królikowski, Częstochowa 2013, pp. 113–124.

⁴⁴ Cf. Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele „Lumen gentium”*, no. 34.

⁴⁵ The value of such an evangelizing influence was pointed out by St. Paul VI in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, stating that the most important thing is always the testimony of life and direct transmission of faith — from person to person, as Christ did (cf. Paweł VI, *Adhortacja apostołska „Evangelii nuntiandi”*, no. 46, in: Paweł VI, *Adhortacja apostołska „Evangelii nuntiandi” o ewangelizacji w świecie współczesnym*, Wrocław 2001, p. 21; cf. Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele „Lumen gentium”*, no. 38).

⁴⁶ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika „Redemptoris missio” Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II o stałej aktualności posłania misyjnego*, no. 70, <https://www.katolicki.net/index.php/z-zycia-kosciola/z-zycia-kosciola-jan-pawel-ii/z-zycia-kosciola-jan-pawel-ii-encykliki/z-zycia-kosciola-jan-pawel-ii-encyklika-redemptoris-missio/z-zycia-kosciola-jan-pawel-ii-encyklika-redemptoris-missio-4.html> [accessed: 20.04.2023].

⁴⁷ Cf. Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele „Lumen gentium”*, no. 36.

it building a 'civilization of love', and thus introducing the order of love into interpersonal relationships and social life⁴⁸. This is an area where a woman finds an irreplaceable and proper place. Following the Pope, it can be said that 'a woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons finds its first roots. The order of love belongs to the inner life of God Himself, to the Trinitarian life⁴⁹.

Among the most important tasks of a woman in the performance of the royal function, care for life should be put in the first place, which the Pope expressed, among others, in the cited encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. Conversely, in the letter *Mulieris dignitatem* he wrote that the experience of motherhood sharpens woman's sensitivity to other people.

[...] it involves a special communion with the mystery of life that matures in a woman's womb. [...] For a mother accepts and carries another human being inside her, allows him to grow and makes room for him inside her, respecting him in his otherness. Thanks to this, a woman understands and teaches others that human relationships are authentic if they are open to accepting another person, accepted and loved because of the dignity that gives her the very fact of being a person [...]. This is the most important contribution that the Church and humanity expect from women. It is an indispensable precondition for a true cultural renewal⁵⁰.

From this it follows that the defence of the value of life, which is the first and fundamental action in the humanization of culture, is the main task of women in their royal mission. In addition, the 'woman's genius' manifests itself in maintaining sensitivity to the moral and aesthetic order in various areas of life. It is mainly about being guided by the Christian conscience in all areas of human activity⁵¹, for which a woman is especially disposed.

The Pope also sees the irreplaceable role of women in providing support to those in need, and it is not only about charity activities, in which they are irreplaceable, but about helping in 'being human', which allows you to 'constantly rediscover and confirm the integral meaning of humanity⁵². Using her 'genius', a woman sees a man in his uniqueness, greatness and limitations, which is why she tries to meet him and help him. 'In this way', we read in the letter *A ciascuna di voi*, 'the fundamental plan of the Creator is carried out in the history of humanity and in various ways it constantly shows the beauty — not only physical, but

⁴⁸ Cf. A. Otrząsek, *Rola „geniuszu kobiety” w budowaniu „cywilizacji miłości” na podstawie nauczania Jana Pawła II*, „Polonia Sacra” 11 (2007), no. 20, pp. 83–103.

⁴⁹ Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 18.

⁵¹ Cf. Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele „Lumen gentium”*, no. 36.

⁵² Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 7.

above all spiritual, which God has endowed from the beginning with man, and in particular with woman⁵³. In the message *It is with genuine pleasure*, which the holy Pope addressed to Gertrude Mongella — secretary general of the Fourth UN World Conference on women in Beijing, he points out that the Church, recognizing the irreplaceable role of women in the family, also recognizes their invaluable contribution to well-being and progress of society. At the same time, he expects that ‘women will do even more to protect society from the deadly virus of degradation and violence that is spreading at an alarming rate today’⁵⁴.

It can therefore be said that the ‘royal’ manifestation of the ‘female genius’ consists primarily in securing the very value of the person and her humanity. Meanwhile, as the Pope notes, in our times we observe ‘a gradual loss of sensitivity to man, to what is essentially human’, therefore ‘our times above all await the manifestation of that «genius» of women who will secure sensitivity to man in every situation: because she is a human! And because «the greatest is love» (1 Cor 13:13)’⁵⁵.

In the face of growing threats, there is an urgent need for a Christian woman not to succumb to the pressure of contemporary feminist movements with a clear secular and liberal orientation⁵⁶, but to rediscover her feminine ‘genius’ as a special sensitivity to the person given to her by God. Then she can not only fulfil her feminine vocation, but also effectively contribute to the proper direction of the development of modern civilization.

3. Mary’s ‘woman’s genius’

When looking for manifestations of the ‘woman’s genius’, one should first of all look at the most beautiful of women, whom the pious tradition has called *Tota pulchra* since antiquity. Undoubtedly, the Mother of God is the most perfect and unsurpassed model of femininity⁵⁷.

What according to St. John Paul II is hidden under the concept of the ‘woman’s genius’, we find in the highest degree in the person and life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore, from the perspective of the Christian faith, it is impossible to understand who a woman is without referring to the attitudes of

⁵³ Jan Paweł II, *List do kobiet „A ciascuna di voi”*, no. 12.

⁵⁴ Idem, *It is with genuine pleasure*, no. 5, in: *Wybór listów Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, vol. 1, Kraków 1997, pp. 212–213.

⁵⁵ Idem, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 31.

⁵⁶ About different trends of contemporary feminism see R. Putnam Tong, *Mysł feministyczna. Wprowadzenie*, Warszawa 2002.

⁵⁷ Cf. J. Sprutta, *Maryja jako Tota Pulchra. Na granicy teologii i sztuki*, „Salvatoris Mater” 5 (2003), no. 4, pp. 193–200.

the Immaculata and imitating her, which is the basis of an authentic Marian cult⁵⁸, and at the same time a spirituality proper to a Christian woman, which is Marian by nature⁵⁹.

Noteworthy is the statement of St. John Paul II that femininity itself is a special bond with the Mother of the Redeemer that every woman is able to establish. In fact, looking at Mary, 'she discovers in her the secret of living her femininity with dignity and true fulfilment of herself'. The Church, too, in the light of Mary, 'sees in women the reflections of a beauty that reflects the highest sentiments of which the human heart is capable'⁶⁰. The person of Mary is therefore the anticipation and fulfilment of all that the Pope defines as the 'feminine genius'. He expressed this when he wrote in the cited letter *A ciascuna di voi* that 'the Church sees the fullest expression of the «feminine genius» in Mary and finds in her a source of constant inspiration. Mary called herself «the handmaid of the Lord» (cf. Lk 1:38). Through obedience to the Word of God, she accepted the privileged vocation — not at all easy — of wife and mother of a family from Nazareth. Devoting herself to the service of God, she also gave herself to the service of people: the service of love'⁶¹.

Among the manifestations of the feminine 'genius' of Mary, one must put in the first place her faith, which the holy Pope compared to the faith of Abraham⁶². By virtue of faith she is constantly present in the mystery of Christ and the Church⁶³. Mary, prepared by the privilege of the Immaculate Conception, was already introduced to this mystery at the moment of the Annunciation⁶⁴. Her boundless faith, which a woman can have thanks to the cooperation with God's grace, made her 'conceive in the spirit before the body: precisely by faith!'⁶⁵.

⁵⁸ In the exhortation *Marialis cultus* (of February 2, 1974), St. Paul VI wrote that 'above all, the Church has always recommended the faithful to imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, certainly not because of the kind of life she led, much less the socio-cultural conditions in which her life developed — now almost everywhere outdated — but because, in the particular situation of her life, she adhered completely and responsibly to God's will (cf. Lk 1:38); that she took His word and put it into practice; that her action was animated by love and the will to serve; that she turned out to be the first and most perfect Disciple of Christ; and this certainly has a universal and enduring value of a role model' (no. 35).

⁵⁹ Cf. D. Mastalska, *Jaka duchowość maryjna dla kobiet?*, „Salvatoris Mater” 12 (2010), no. 1–2, pp. 122–168.

⁶⁰ Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika „Redemptoris Mater” o błogosławionej Maryi Dziewicy w życiu pielgrzymującego Kościoła*, no. 46, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031987_redemptoris-mater.html [accessed: 20.04.2023].

⁶¹ Idem, *List do kobiet „A ciascuna di voi”*, no. 10.

⁶² Cf. idem, *Encyklika „Redemptoris Mater”*, no. 14; F. Cecchin, *W poszukiwaniu Maryi. Komentarz egzystencjalny do encykliki „Redemptoris Mater”*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 31–37.

⁶³ Cf. Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele „Lumen gentium”*, no. 54.

⁶⁴ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika „Redemptoris Mater”*, no. 8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 13.

Thus, ‘from the moment of conception and birth, she has been a special witness to the mystery of Jesus’⁶⁶.

If, analysing the teaching of the holy Pope, we have said that one of the manifestations of the ‘woman’s genius’ is her ‘genuine resonance of mind and heart, the response of faith’⁶⁷, then in the case of Mary we find its confirmation in the double testimony of the evangelist Luke, who in the context of the mystery of the incarnation noted that ‘she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart’ (Luke 2:19, 51). The *Magnificat* sung by her is also a confirmation of this. Indeed, the holy Pope writes that ‘through the sublimity and at the same time the great simplicity of the words flowing from the sacred texts of the people of Israel, Mary’s personal experience, the ecstasy of her heart, is pierced’⁶⁸. Indeed, believing despite ‘all the trials and adversities of Jesus’ childhood, and then during the years of His hidden life in Nazareth, where Jesus «was subjected to them»⁶⁹, she ‘became, in a sense, the first «disciple» of her Son, the first to whom He seemed to say «follow Me», before He uttered this call to the Apostles or anyone else’⁷⁰. Although Mary did not receive a mission like the apostles, she remained faithful more than they did and ‘through faith she was perfectly united with Christ in His destruction’⁷¹. Thanks to this, she remained under the Cross until the end (cf. Jn 19:25). Experiencing the destructive *kenosis* of her faith⁷², the Mother of the Lord confirmed the priestly dimension of her ‘feminine genius’. In the most difficult trials, both before Simeon’s prophecy (cf. Lk 2:35) and then at the Cross on Golgotha, the Mother of God showed ‘the heroic obedience of faith ... to the «unsearchable judgements» of God’⁷³. As a result, she became ‘a unique witness to the mystery of Christ’⁷⁴.

Mary’s motherhood, the culmination of the ‘woman’s genius’, was first expressed physically in the mystery of the Incarnation before the Eternal Word, and spiritually in the Upper Room, where the Church was born by the power of the Holy Spirit⁷⁵. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she was there to ‘root the order of love in the created world of persons’ — an order ‘of Trinitarian life’ whose Holy Spirit ‘is the personal hypostasis of love’⁷⁶. In this way, Mary became

⁶⁶ Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika „Redemptoris Mater”*, no. 26.

⁶⁷ Idem, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 15.

⁶⁸ Idem, *Encyklika „Redemptoris Mater”*, no. 36.

⁶⁹ Ibid., no. 17.

⁷⁰ Ibid., no. 20.

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 18.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., no. 27.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 38.

⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 29.

the first consecrated woman and at the same time the model of all consecrated women⁷⁷.

The 'fullness of grace' enjoyed by her from the moment of her immaculate conception is the key to understanding her 'inner truth', that is, what is at the heart of her 'feminine genius'⁷⁸. This supernatural endowment of the Mother of God, about which the archangel Gabriel spoke at the time of the Annunciation (cf. Lk 1:28), perfects her virginity and is the source of spiritual motherhood, which — according to the Pope — 'manifests itself in Mary's care for people, in helping them to meet their needs and shortcomings on a wide scale. [...] This meeting people's needs means at the same time bringing them within the range of Christ's messianic mission and saving power. It is therefore a mediation: Mary puts herself between her Son and people in their situations of want, privation and suffering⁷⁹. Mary's maternal care is thus simultaneously a sanctifying and saving mediation with the Son⁸⁰.

The 'feminine genius' of Mary is distinguished by the fact that it is equally manifested in her virginity and motherhood, that is, in these two most basic dimensions of the fulfilment of every woman's personality. While in the order of nature they are in principle opposed to each other, in Mary — as the Pope emphasizes — 'they met and united in a unique way, so that one did not exclude the other, but wonderfully complemented it'⁸¹. Thus, Mary's consent to motherhood is first and foremost the fruit of her total virginal dedication to God. 'Mary accepted the choice to be the Mother of the Son of God, guided by spousal love which completely consecrates, that is, «consecrates» the human person to God. By virtue of this love, Mary desires always and in everything to be devoted to God, living in virginity⁸². In these words, St. John Paul II expressed what is the essential nucleus of the 'woman's genius', that is, the attitude of love as having oneself in self-giving⁸³. It is the supreme love that the Sacred Scripture exalts (cf. Jn 15:13). It was expressed in Mary's concern for a particular man, as evidenced by her attitude at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (cf. Jn 2:1–11) and countless Mariophanies throughout the history of the Church.

⁷⁷ Cf. T. Paszkowska, *Maryja pierwsza Konsekrowana*, „Salvatoris Mater” 17 (2015), no. 1–4, pp. 11–28; P. Warchoł, *Maryja inspiracją dla osób konsekrowanych*, *ibid.*, pp. 61–76.

⁷⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika „Redemptoris Mater”*, no. 19.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 21.

⁸⁰ Cf. R. Kuczer, *Macierzyńskie pośrednictwo Maryi w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, „Salvatoris Mater” 7 (2005), no. 1, pp. 328–375.

⁸¹ *Idem*, *List apostolski „Mulieris dignitatem”*, no. 17.

⁸² *Idem*, *Encyklika „Redemptoris Mater”*, no. 39.

⁸³ Cf. Sobór Watykański II, *Konstytucja duszpasterska o Kościele w świecie współczesnym „Gaudium et spes”*, no. 24.

For St. John Paul II, it can therefore be said that Mary is a model of a fulfilled woman who helps everyone ‘to understand the «woman’s genius», not only so that God’s concrete plan can be carried out, but also so that women can play a greater role in different environments of the social life’⁸⁴.

Conclusions

Starting from the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries, when veneration for the Mother of God began to develop in the Church, countless Christian women made the effort to imitate her. And while no one before St. John Paul II spoke of the ‘feminine genius’, it was on this path that Christian girls, wives and mothers, and especially women consecrated to God, achieved ‘a high standard of ordinary Christian life’, i.e. holiness⁸⁵.

Among them one can find the Servant of God, Jadwiga Zamoyska, whose lifestyle, the writings she left behind, the implemented program of social work and the works she undertook⁸⁶ are an excellent manifestation of her ‘feminine genius’. She was characterized by lively faith, which she constantly deepened intellectually, striving for union with the Lord Jesus; imitating Mary; and above all, a truly motherly care for people, especially women, for whom she founded in 1882 and maintained for years the School of Housework for Women. Like many aristocrats from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Mrs General Zamoyska expressed her patriotism by positivist involvement in the upbringing, and especially the formation of women, in order to make them responsible for the life of society and the Church on the one hand, and to protect them from the traps of contemporary emancipation trends on the other. Upbringing, which according to her should combine the vertical and horizontal dimensions, she saw as striving for the ultimate goal, which is the salvation of the soul and union with God⁸⁷.

Therefore, she belongs to those women who ‘were invented by God’, as she used to call herself, quoting her husband⁸⁸, and to whom the papal term the ‘woman’s genius’ can be applied in its entirety.

⁸⁴ Anioł Pański, 8 III 1998, no. 3, in: Jan Paweł II, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 16, Kraków 2009, p. 326; cf. K. Parzych, *Maryja — osoba spełniona jako kobieta*, „Salvatoris Mater” 8 (2006), no. 1–2, pp. 191–206.

⁸⁵ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski „Novo millennio ineunte”*, no. 31.

⁸⁶ See: M.J. Gondek, *Jadwiga Zamoyska i jej program pracy społecznej*, „Człowiek w Kulturze” 17 (2005), pp. 241–255.

⁸⁷ See A. Rynio, B. Błasiak, *Myśli Jadwigi Zamoyskiej o wychowaniu*, „Roczniki Nauk Społecznych” 19–20 (1991–1992), issue 2, pp. 21–22.

⁸⁸ E.M. Kostrzewska, *Kobiety przez Boga wymyślone (rzecz o księżce Katarzyny Czachowskiej, Generalowa Jadwiga Zamoyska [1831–1923]. Życie i dzieło*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, *Poznań 2011*, p. 396), „Studia z Historii Społeczno-Gospodarczej” 11 (2013), p. 148.

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