



New Feminism

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ABSTRACT

The term was basically used in Britain in the 1920s to differentiate new feminists from traditional mainstream suffragist feminism. These women, also referred to as welfare feminists, were particularly concerned with motherhood, like their opposite numbers in Germany at the time, Helene Stocker and her Bund für Mutterschutz. New feminists campaigned strongly in favor of such measures as family allowances paid directly to mothers. They were also largely supportive of protective legislation in factory & industry. A major proponent of this was Eleanor Rathbone of the suffragist-successor society, the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship.

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I. INTRODUCTION

New feminists were opposed prominently by young women, especially those in the Six Point Group, mainly Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain, and Dorothy Evans, who found this as a retrograde step towards the separate spheres ideology of the 19th century. They were particularly opposed to protective legislation, which they saw as being in practice restrictive legislation, which kept women out of better-paid jobs on the pretext of health and welfare considerations.

In early years, the concept has been revived by feminists in response to Pope John Paul II's call for a "new feminism" that rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination' in the context of acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation, 'Reconcile people with life!'. John Paul II correlates the new feminism of pro-life, pro-person advocacy to the feminine genius identified in his 1988 apostolic letter Mulieris Dignitatem, or, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women. In section 30 of this letter, John Paul II identified women as having a "genius that belongs" to them and called on them to use it to restore "sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance. Women are mothers and care-givers as well as participants in every realm of human endeavor. He describes the 'feminine genius' as including empathy, interpersonal relations, emotive capacity, subjectivity, communication, intuition and personalization. In the controversial section 24 of this letter, John Paul II defends the equality of women and argues that husbands and wives are to be mutually submissive to each other. John Paul II had begun his theologically-based affirmation of integral gender complementarities in his "Wednesday audiences" between 1979 and 1984, that is now compiled as the Theology of the Body. In this work, he describes his belief that men and women are formed as complementary human beings for the sake of

loving and being loved. According to John Paul II women have to become advocates of humanity in his 'Apostolic Letter to Women' prior to the 1995; Beijing Women's conference. Since that time, women became interested in advocating for the person along with their male collaborators--have been developing personalist feminism.

Basically "Personalist feminism" was a term coined by Prudence Allen to describe the feminism called from John Paul II. Women have also been developing new feminism as a philosophical theory about sexual complementarities. They agree that being the equal to men in their professional and social capacities does not require denying their physical differences as women nor the importance of being a mother whether physically or spiritually. While the Greeks acknowledged that the possibility of sex complementarities, systematic developments into this philosophy of the person did not begin until Augustine of Hippo, who recognized the implications of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. The first western philosopher to articulate a complete theory of sex complementarities was Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th-century Benedictine nun. Her advances were soon buried by the 13th century Aristotelian Revolution and the lack of higher education for women in the following centuries.

The Philosophical developments in the concept of integral gender complementarities were popularized in the first half of the 20th century by two students of Edmund Husserl: Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Edith Stein. Von Hildebrand argued against the "terrible anti-personalize" of his age, stating that it is the "general dissimilarity in the nature of both which enables... a real complementary relationship". Stein revived the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas to argue that a difference in bodies constitutes a difference in spirit, that the soul is not unisex. Stein's argument has been criticized for not realizing that the immateriality of the human soul transcends the limitations of the body as Aquinas argues. New feminist theories were also influenced by the Personalize and Phenomenology movements of the early 20th century.

Integral complementarities differ from fractional complementarities, in that it argues that men and women are each whole persons in and of themselves, and, together, equal more than the sum of their parts. The concept of fractional complementarity argues that a man and woman each make up a part of a person. By this theory, when they are joined together, that they comprise one, composite being. New feminists promote an understanding of the human person as one who is made in the image and likeness of God or imago Dei for the purpose of union and communion. They see distinct differences in the ways in which men and women make a sincere gift of themselves through the 'nuptial meaning of the body', and see these gifts as shedding light on the mysteries of God and their own vocation, mission and dignity.

Other prominent ideas by new feminists include:

- That the different bodily structures of men and women lead both to different lived experiences.
- Those the different ways in which men and women give life physically are linked to emotional, spiritual, and intellectual dispositions.
- That fulfillment as a woman means exercising maternal care, whether physically or spiritually. New feminists believe that whether or not they do it well, women are physically structured to be mothers, to develop life with their wombs. That they purport the idea that the physical capacity for motherhood connects with the psychological, spiritual and emotional characteristics that women would need to be mothers.
- That regardless of whether or not a woman ever gives birth; she has the capacity for maternal love in spiritual motherhood.

The feminine genius:

The very idea about the term the feminine genius is applied to describe the genius that John Paul II identified as belonging to women, "which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance." He argues that this sensitivity is linked to maternity. Work on unpacking the nature of this link can be found in various anthologies, such as *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism* in 2004 and *Woman as Prophet in the Home and the World* in 2016. The characteristics of these feminine genius-maternity links raise many open questions. An example in this concern:

Emphasis on the person:

As women can have to receive and develop life within their wombs, women have a special openness to the new person - their child. This includes the capacity to unify all of humankind because people were all once united with their mothers in their wombs. The open questions here include the degree to which it takes a decision to consider every human person as some one's child and the ways in which such a decision has implications for social policy, the arts, and human culture.

Empathy:

As it is the need to care for their developing children, within their wombs and as infants, caring mothers tend to become more empathetic. The open questions on this characteristic include whether the development of empathy is physiological or the result of the choice to be caring. They also include evaluating Edith Stein's argument that women have "a profound need to share their lives with another and, consequently, a capacity for unselfish love, for commitment, a capacity to transcend the self".

Receptivity:

Only women are created with a physical empty space inside of themselves capable of receiving another person and conceiving new life. During pregnancy, women give a gift of self - their own bodies - so that others, their children, can receive the gift of life. The open questions here include the correlation between sexual receptivity and other kinds of receptivity, e.g. emotional, psychological, spiritual, intellectual and so forth.

Protection of life:

Because of the new human life within their wombs, women have a prominent vocation to care for their own children and a special sensitivity to the needs of all those who cannot care for themselves - the weak, the poor, and the outcast - all those whose life is not valued. New feminists believe it to be a particular injustice when women support abortion, infanticide, embryonic stem cell research, or in-vitro fertilization. The open questions here concern the best ways to meet the needs of women and offer the support necessary to end these injustices and build a more humane society. Personalist feminists argue that the collaboration of men is so necessary for these tasks that they too need to be feminists.

Sanctity and modesty:

Women have a sense of modesty to guard towards the exploitation or objectification of that holy mystery. Only total love - unconditional commitment and mutual self-giving in marriage - "has the capacity to absorb the shame of human nature." The key to this absorption is valuing sexuality as the embodiment of a person who is

dearly loved. New feminists are typically against what Russell D. Moore termed "the Concubine Culture" of couples living together and having sex outside of marriage.

Supportive of men:

By enabling men to become fathers, women give men a precious gift. While he shares in parenthood, man always remains outside the process of pregnancy and birth. In many ways, women facilitate a man's fatherhood and parenting skills. For New feminists, the fulfillment of masculinity means being a father, whether physically or spiritually. In order to become a physical father, a man must give away his semen, in order to create new life. All spiritual fathers, according to New Feminists, have a special task to protect the mutual self-giving of man and woman. This sense of protection of their wives and families is also built into a man's physical capacities in the greater physical strength of men, generally speaking, as well as their psychological need to feel competent and capable. There are many unresolved questions here include the ways in which women facilitate fatherhood, substantiating the claim that fatherhood is key to male fulfillment, and the ways in which fatherhood is imaged in the Trinity and by Christ.

There is a bias views as not all new feminists accept John Paul II's argument in sections 23-24 of *Mulieris Dignitatem* that due to Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 5:21, husband and wives are to be mutually submissive. For example, in Eastern Orthodoxy, spiritual fatherhood means spiritual priesthood – the offering of a man's body and blood for the sanctification of the world. As Jesus gave his body and blood away both as a sacrifice for his Church and as a gift to the Church in the form of the Eucharist that new spiritual life could be conceived. "A man is 'head' of his wife not to stroke his own ego, but in order to give up his body for her" and thus create new life. As keepers of the Eucharist, men are entrusted with the body and blood of Christ. All men, whether single or married, are entrusted with woman – the body of the Church. "She is their Eucharist."

II. NEW FEMINIST POSITIONS

Distinction, not discrimination:

This is the good thought "Discrimination is an evil, but distinction is God's design." New feminists highlight the fact that men and women are different and that this difference affects the way they live their lives, what they care about, and their strengths and weaknesses. Women can fulfill their vocational calling by acting as spiritual mothers in whatever their occupation: as wife, mother, consecrated woman, working professional, or single woman. Differences between the sexes should never be used to unilaterally discriminate except in cases when a task is contingent upon a person being of a certain sex, e.g., women give birth and only men can be priests in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Marriage as communion:

New feminists think that marriage to be a reciprocal self-giving of persons in free, total, faithful and fruitful communion. This means that marriage is more than a "partnership"; it is a communion of persons.

Celebration of the family and the home:

Thus the New feminists argue that a true feminism is not just about women, it is about the Family – both individually and collectively in the Church and Humanity. The family is the foundational unit of society, yet

many women do not have the choice to stay at home with their children because of social, economic or political pressures. Women's work as mothers and in the home must be valued as good in and of itself.

Love and service, not power, domination or bitterness:

Unhappy by what they see as the bitterness, hatred, or retribution of many feminists against men or other women for current or past injustices, new feminists argue that men and women should cooperate and coordinate with one another in interpersonal communion. This means giving of themselves in mutual service and love.

True freedom remembers purpose, including laws as well as rules:

For men and women to be truly free, new feminists assert that they must honor the Creator and love accordingly. Philosophy and Religion, then, are essential components in the search for how men and women *should* and *ought* to act for "a higher truth or good", not just how they want or can act. New feminists assert that people must gratefully remember God loves them as shown by creation; they must recognize that life, in some way, that is a gift and not a mere thing which a person can claim as his or her exclusive property.

Fruitfulness, not just productivity:

To fruitful means to enable others to love and be loved. While productivity is valuable, helpful and necessary, it must be geared towards respect and love for the person – even though it takes longer, requires patience and the cooperation of others, and is appreciated not measured. Every act of service is a witness to the worth of the human person and thus it promotes the progress of the whole human race.

Fertility, not sterility:

Many of them this kind of new feminists assert that fertility is a natural, healthy biological process, not a disease that women need to take the Pill to be cured from. If women respect their fertility – their potential for physical and spiritual motherhood, they demand respect from others and deny that their sexuality is reducible to self-gratification. This devaluing of sexuality occurs with the use of contraceptives. Thus, the vast majority of new feminists discuss the spiritual, emotional, and physical benefits for men and women by following natural family planning instead of utilizing contraception.

Proponents:

In the Contemporary era the proponents includes [Pia de Solenni](#), [Janet E. Smith](#), Katrina Zeno, [Elizabeth Fox-Genovese](#), R. Mary Lemmons, Colleen Carroll Campbell, [Mary Beth Bonacci](#), Sister [Prudence Allen](#), [Alice von Hildebrand](#), [Kimberly Hahn](#), Helen Alvare, [Dorinda C. Bordlee](#), Erika Bachiochi, and Mary Ellen Bork. The work of earlier Catholic thinkers on masculinity and femininity, such as [Hildegard of Bingen](#), [Edith Stein](#) and [G. E. M. Anscombe](#), has also become recently influential in the development of new feminism. Though primarily originally in the thought of John Paul II, the movement also includes prominent non-Catholics, like Jewish author [Wendy Shalit](#) and Protestant activist Enola Aird.

III. CRITIQUES

The Critiques of the new feminism argue that it was created by a patriarchal structure for its own maintenance. As commented by Sister of Mercy Mary Aquin O'Neill, director of the Mount Agnes Theological Center for Women in Baltimore, it will always mean that men are defining women and telling women what it is like to be a woman. According to this view, until women are members of this higher authority, they can never make authoritative decisions about their perspectives because they are excluded from the vote. Those critics maintain that no movement that opposes abortion and birth control in the form of artificial contraception can be positive for women. New feminism may also be a form of gender or biological determinism, which may be seen as old prejudices in a new guise.

The modern use of new feminism by the Catholic Church attempts to stray away from the traditional sentiments of the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia that the women and men do not belong together in the political, economic, and social spheres. It was never clarified as to why these changes were made, and the Holy See still followed many premises that shared the same anthropological arguments of the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia. The next critique of new feminism is that Pope John Paul II's positions can too easily be tied to more traditional Catholic teachings. This could cause the continuation of a worldview that negates the ability for men and women to successfully work together in a professional and social setting.

IV. REFERENCES

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