



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN A SEMINAR
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF "MULIERIS DIGNITATEM"**

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 12 October 2013*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I wish to share a few words with you, even if briefly, on the important theme that you have been discussing these days: woman's vocation and mission in our time. I thank you for the contribution you have made as we commemorate the 25th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*: a historic document, the first of the Papal Magisterium entirely dedicated to the subject of woman. You have especially studied the point which states that God entrusts man, the human being, in a special way to woman (cf. n. 30).

What does this "special entrusting", this special entrusting of the human being to woman mean? It seems evident to me that my Predecessor is referring to motherhood. Many things can change and have changed in cultural and social evolution, but the fact remains that it is woman who conceives, carries and delivers the children of men. And this is not merely a biological fact; it entails a wealth of implications both for woman herself, her way of being, and for her relationships, her relation to human life and to life in general. In calling woman to motherhood, God entrusted the human being to her in an entirely special way.

Here, however, two dangers are ever present, two opposite extremes that mortify woman and her vocation. The first is to reduce motherhood to a social role, to a task which, though regarded as noble, in fact, sets the woman and her potential aside and does not fully esteem her value in the structure of the community. This may happen both in civil and ecclesial circles. And, as a reaction to this, there is another danger in the opposite direction, that of promoting a kind of emancipation

that, in order to fill areas that have been taken away from the male, deserts the feminine attributes with all its precious characteristics. And here I would like to stress that woman has a particular sensitivity to the “things of God”, above all in helping us understand the mercy, tenderness and love that God has for us. I also like to think of the Church not as an “it” but as a “she”. The Church is woman, she is mother, and this is beautiful. You must consider and go deeper into this.

Mulieris dignitatem is set within this context, and offers a deep and organic reflection with a solid anthropological basis illuminated by Revelation. It is from here that we must endeavour once more to deepen and promote an undertaking that I have wished for many times already. In the Church as well, it is important to ask oneself: what sort of presence does woman have? I suffer — to tell you the truth — when I see in the Church or in Church organizations that the role of service, which we all have and should have... when a woman’s role of service slides into *servidumbre* [servitude]. I don’t know if that is how you say it in Italian. Do you understand me? Service. When I see women carrying out acts of servitude, it is because the role a woman should play is not properly understood. What presence do women have in the Church? Can it be developed further? This question is close to my heart and that is why I wanted to meet with you — outside the norm, because a meeting of this kind was not scheduled — to bless you and your undertaking. Thank you, let us carry it forward together! May Mary Most Holy, the great woman, Mother of Jesus and of all God’s children, accompany us. Thank you.