

# WITH ALL HER MIND

A Call to the Intellectual Life

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Foreword by Tracey Rowland

WORD  
on FIRE.

# Foreword

Pope St. John Paul II coined the expression “the feminine genius.” Without having made anything like an academic study of the concept, I have always assumed he derived the idea from Edith Stein. She thought that women have a capacity, one might say a “radar,” for discerning the personal dimension of any issue. By “personal,” I mean that women can usually see beyond the surface of human actions to the deeper motivating forces in play behind them. It is something like a finely tuned power of intuition.

I had a recent experience of this when having breakfast with the Ratzinger Prize winner Professor Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz. The topic of conversation was Martin Heidegger. She remarked that because of his health, Heidegger was rejected by two seminaries. I knew that he had left a Jesuit seminary, but I had no idea of the reason for this. I assumed he left because he had lost his faith, or because he did not like the curriculum or spiritual regime, or some combination of these factors. Whatever the combination of factors, I had assumed that his departure from the Jesuits was his own choice. I had no idea that he had been rejected by the Jesuits and by diocesan officials. However, Professor Gerl-Falkovitz explained that Heidegger was a very short man with poor health, and she thought that these factors, along with being twice rejected as a seminarian, had an impact upon his philosophy.

My thoughts then turned to another conversation from some years earlier, indeed almost three decades ago now. Fr. Patrick Lynch, who had been a student at the University of Munich during the time of the Second Vatican Council, looked at me across a table at a café in Cambridge and asked, “You *do*

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understand that Vatican II was all about Heideggerizing Catholic theology?” In other words, whatever Pope John XXIII may have had in mind when he explained that his purpose for calling the council was to “open windows,” the fact was that for many German scholars, the particular windows they wanted to open entailed an engagement with Heidegger. Just as one cause of World War I may have been Kaiser Wilhelm’s bad relationship with his English mother, and one cause of World War II may have been Hitler’s early failure as an artist, the rejection of Heidegger from two seminaries may have sent shock waves through twentieth-century philosophy and Catholic intellectual life. The capacity to identify such cause-and-effect relationships, or at least be sensitive to them, is something I associate with the feminine genius.

Each of the authors who have contributed to this collection has found inspiration in the idea of the feminine genius. Each contribution is unique, but taken as a mosaic, this book offers a window into the lives of significant Catholic scholarly women of our time. Some are young and single; others are juggling marriage, motherhood, and a professional life; and others have chosen the path of the evangelical counsels. All have signed up for frontline service in what the Australian poet James McAuley called the “wars of love.” St. John Paul II called it the battle for the civilization of love.

My own experience is that the life of a Catholic scholar is never easy, but it is also never boring. It is, fundamentally, a vocation. It is never easy because one gets thrown into the center of the cosmic battle. Indeed, one often finds, as one of the contributors to this collection notes, that being on the payroll of the Church in no way guarantees a workplace where Christian principles prevail. Nominally Catholic institutions and agencies can be themselves bloody battlefields. The inverse side of this coin, however, is that the hotter the battle, the deeper the friendships that are forged, and the darker the nights of the soul, the more luminous the mornings of grace that arise from them. A central element of salvation history is that there is no glory without the cross—no Easter Sunday without a Good Friday.

Hans Urs von Balthasar understood this, as did his cofounder of the Community of St. John, the mystic Adrienne von Speyr, who had experiences

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of the stigmata over the Easter Triduum. Balthasar also suggested that the characters who surrounded Christ in the Gospels are “spiritual types” in the Church. In other words, different Apostles showcase different missions in the life of the Church. The scholarly vocation has always seemed to me to be a fusion of the missions of St. John and St. James. For a Catholic scholar, the contemplative side of St. John needs to combine with knowledge of the Catholic intellectual tradition and a disposition of filial fidelity in its transmission, typical of St. James. There also needs to be a Marian dimension—what Balthasar called *disponibilité*—the availability to serve and an openness to receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

For there to be a “space” that makes this all possible—in other words, for there to be institutions that nurture Catholic intellectual life—there needs to be creative episcopal governance. Quite simply, we need bishops who understand the importance of the intellectual life and are prepared to support it politically, financially, and spiritually. This is part of what Balthasar called the Petrine mission.

Throughout this collection, a number of names are frequently cited as showcase examples of the feminine genius. Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux are both Doctors of the Church, and Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) is a patron saint of Europe. All were Carmelites, and thus they can be associated with the contemplative mission of St. John. St. Faustina Kowalska, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, is one of the biggest names in contemporary spirituality. She is the most recent in a long line of female mystics who have encouraged devotion to the Sacred Heart and trust in Christ’s mercy. Earlier names in this lineage include St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, St. Gertrude the Great, and St. Mechtilde. In the past century, women have also played a significant role in the foundation of new ecclesial movements. In addition to Speyr, Chiara Lubich and Carmen Hernández are the most noteworthy examples here.

Two of my favorite exemplars of the feminine genius are St. Jadwiga, queen of Poland (1373–1399), the patroness of the great Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and Ida Friederike Görres (1901–1971), a writer who

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found consolation in the theological works of Joseph Ratzinger before he was famous. In the midst of the theological chaos of the 1960s, Görres described Ratzinger in letters to a friend as her “prophet in Israel”—the one voice she found to be a credible interpreter of the documents of the Second Vatican Council—and the potential “theological conscience of the German Church,” no less. Görres also wrote significant works on the lives of the saints.

Whoever may be the reader’s own heroines and exemplars of the feminine genius, I warmly commend this collection of essays by faithful Catholic women striving to put this gift of their creation at the service of the Church.

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