

IN SEARCH OF THE MASCULINE GENIUS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF WALTER J. ONG

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Abstract: John Paul II advanced the powerful idea of the “feminine genius,” but did not offer a corresponding profile of the meaning of maleness and masculinity. This presentation describes the contribution of the late Walter J. Ong, SJ to our understanding of men and their gifts in the orders of creation and redemption. In his landmark book, *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (1981), Ong wove together animal studies, developmental psychology, cultural anthropology, and theology to articulate a profile of masculinity that continues to hold up well decades later. According to Ong, created maleness is marked by expendability, agonistic differentiation, and exteriority which can be seen as complementary to traits recognized by the contemporary magisterium as gifts typical of women: durability, receptive identification, and interiority. The natural substrate serves as a foundation for a masculine mode of discipleship marked by self-sacrifice, ascetical leadership, and signification of transcendence.