

# The Theological History of Woman



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A Study in Catholic Theology of Tradition &  
Development of Doctrine

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## Introduction

<sup>28</sup> And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one;’ <sup>30</sup> and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” – Mark 12: 28-31

The two greatest commandments form an interpretive key for all Catholic social teaching. This key is the person, the *Logos* himself, the center of and answer to every “coincidence of opposites.”<sup>1</sup> Any aversion to Catholic ethics is quelled in the Love of the One True God that is simultaneously the love for one’s self and the love of neighbor.<sup>2</sup> These two are the hands in which one can hold the ineffable mystery of the God who *is* Love. In the unity of God-self-other, there are no isolated injustices that are not suffered by the whole body of humanity, nor are there individual charisms that are not experienced by all the members. When the Church speaks of hierarchy or difference it is *always within* the context of trinitarian oneness, just as the *Logos* and Spirit originate in and reveal the Father. The philosophical paradox of the one and the many is the quintessential enigma of contingent being. Its pressure is felt in every sphere of human observation, from the wave-particle duality of light, to the mathematical principle of trans-finite sets, to the fractal geometry of natural formations, to the mimesis of biological reproduction, to the bi-furcation of essence and experience. The Christian Trinity *alone* is able to communicate the idea that *Reality Itself* is both a complementary and a generative relationship. The revelation of unorginate Love through the historical Incarnation of God alleviates and elevates the existential crisis of human existence as no other theory or practice can. In and through the Triune Father the pattern and purpose of life is illuminated.

Like all human organizations, the Church defines herself through the lens and language of an engendered people, male and female. The 1997 Catechism states that “sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his or her body and soul” – a fact which takes on added significance due to the prominence in Scripture of nuptial language expressive of divine Love (CCC

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<sup>1</sup> St. Bonaventure’s phrase for the many dialectical paradoxes in life, such as God-man, man-woman, spirit-matter, truth-love, and/or human-world.

<sup>2</sup> See, Craig Steven Titus and Philip Scrofani, “The Art of Love: A Roman Catholic Psychology of Love,” *Journal Of Psychology & Christianity* 31, no. 2 (Summer2012 2012): 118-129.

2332).<sup>3</sup> Although the archetypal properties of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ transcend biological sex, their linguistic provenance resides in the embodied man and woman as such. Thus, sex and gender are never entirely divorceable. Sister Prudence Allen has single-handedly invented the discipline of historical reconstruction in women’s gender identity. Through her work, one can trace the development of “the concept of woman.” The theology of woman developed alongside philosophical anthropology, which in turn followed the popular movements of history, not significantly diverging from Greek theories until the modern period. Gender anthropology can be divided into four genera: 1) gender-unity, 2) gender-polarity or reverse gender-polarity 3) gender-complementarity, as either fractional or integral, and 4) gender-neutrality.<sup>4</sup>

For a philosophy to be considered an identity theory it must address sexuality across the metaphysical, natural, epistemological, and ethical planes. The theory of gender-unity was first proposed by Plato. Though he was not entirely consistent, Plato’s philosophy of sexuality located human identity in the soul or mind, where gender distinction did not exist, thereby equalizing the sexes. This theory was prevalent in the first three centuries of Christianity, as many strove to live the *Vita Angelica* (cf. Gal 3:28; Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25), which for women often meant “becoming male,” hence the phenomenon of the transvestite female prophet. Gender-polarity was the designation given to Aristotle’s theory, which placed women on the negative and inferior pole of all four philosophical planes. From Aristotle grew the long tradition of seeing the female as a “deformed” male, or “misbegotten” in Aquinas, a belief unchallenged by the Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council. Reverse-gender-polarity – spinning the poles in favor of women – made its decisive appearance in the writings of Basil the Great, who afforded to women superiority in the realm of grace. Different views of female supremacy would be advanced by Abelard, some Renaissance humanists, Schleiermacher, and a plethora of modern feminists. Gender-complementarity refers to symmetrical sexual difference within equal dignity, and can be viewed as a rejection of both the Platonic error of body-soul duality and the Aristotelian error of hierarchy in generation. Many Church Fathers, including Tertullian and Saint Jerome, hinted at a sex-complementary position, but *only* in their teachings on virginity. The female virgin was highly venerated and set apart in the early

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<sup>3</sup> “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father’s work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task.” CCC § 2205.

<sup>4</sup> Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: Volume II, The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250-1500, Part 1* (Grand Rapids, MI.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 17.

and medieval Churches, occasionally even lauded as the intellectual and moral complement to the male clergy. Fractional complementarity means that man and woman are incomplete without each other; in this view, man and woman are *merely* the sum of their parts. Integral complementarity, on the other hand, asserts the complementarity of autonomous men and women whose addition to one another adds an emergent value, through corporeal, artistic, or spiritual forms of generative union.

Saint Augustine attempted the first real *theory* of gender-complementarity by affirming that sexual difference would continue in the Resurrection where there is no inequality or imperfection. However, Augustine retained the position of gender-polarity when speaking of men and women in social and family life. Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen, introduced the earliest theory of fractional complementarity that was consistent throughout the four philosophical categories. Male-female dialogue within the double-monastery provided an especially fruitful environment for her work. She even developed an integrally complementary personality theory, with four types for each gender, constructed around the four ‘humours’ (which became the medieval temperaments). Regrettably, Hildegard’s theology was eclipsed by the reemergence of Aristotle in the West, and the shift from Benedictine monasteries to university schools as educational centers. In his appropriation of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas reverted to the gender-polarity theory of the human body, but he also did much to equalize the sexes in the domains of grace and mind. Aquinas’ anthropology became standard doctrine for the Catholic West and was not significantly developed until the rise of Christian neo-Platonism during the Renaissance.

The definitive moment in the history of the Catholic Church’s theology of woman occurred in the teaching and influence of Saint John Paul II. Following the lead of first and second wave feminism and the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II reinterpreted the Church’s theological anthropology in terms of primary integral gender-complementarity. John Paul II freed the Church from any lingering doubts about the metaphysical, biological, psychological, and moral equality of women with men. Nevertheless, he also gave important definition to certain elements of fractional complementarity, that is, a certain ontological determination of sexual identity. This is a critical point, as even some prominent feminists have pointed out, since modern philosophical schools tend to ignore the irreducibility of difference (sexual or otherwise). Woman, as an everlastingly engendered human being, embodies femininity in an inimitable way due to her special spiritual and *physiological* disposition toward being a sign of maternal relationality. Woman is born from the wound of the other and awakened in his gaze. As “first-born” the human family has always hinged on her

freedom. This privilege and gift is not her choice but God's design.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the *Theology of the Body* marries the integral and fractional views of human sexuality into a multi-layered "image of God," reflecting a paradoxical trinitarian relationship of woman to God, woman to man, and woman to herself, analogous to the reciprocal relationship of God's nature to God's persons.<sup>6</sup>

The history of the theology of woman exhibits the characteristics of a true development, and *not* a corruption of the Catholic faith, according to John Henry Newman's seven notes. Logical continuity in type and principle is evident for both the doctrine of gender equality and the doctrine of gender difference, which together form the present teaching of simultaneous integral and fractional complementarity. From the first records of Christianity, it is clear that Galatians 3:28 – "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" – is universally interpreted as sexual equality at least in spirit and grace. This was further supported by neo-Platonic ideas in the early Church. In contrast, sexual difference, from Aristotle through the Middle Ages, was preserved in politically charged false concepts of physical and mental hierarchy of male over female. Yet, not every facet of Aristotelian metaphysics was incompatible with this doctrine's development. Man and woman as body-soul composites was an essential Aristotelian contribution. Likewise, the articulation of woman as passive matter to man's active form, as developed in Aquinas, prepared a rough foundation for the ontological female qualities of receptivity and relationality. Conservation of past tradition is unmistakable here. It is crucial to note, however, the relocation of feminine characteristics from the metaphysical to the ontological dimension of the female person. While Aristotelians to Neo-Thomists held to a metaphysical hierarchy of male action over female potency, John Paul II definitively pronounced the metaphysical equality of all human persons and subordinated the masculine and the feminine as one of man or woman's respective personal properties. In this way, the "feminine genius" remained spiritually determined but became *far less constitutive* of the human person who is female, though she may freely conform more or less to its presence in her. This fact witnesses to a special capacity in the historical theology of woman to assimilate and adapt to the future, as John Paul II's teachings have in many ways anticipated scientific advances that corroborate

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<sup>5</sup> See, Alice von Hildebrand, *The Privilege of Being a Woman* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> The conclusion of this project will consider the theological import of a relational systems worldview, one that identifies Christianity with the process of seeking homeostasis across isomorphic spheres of familial 'societies.' See, Don MacDonald, "Connections Between Relational Theologies, Personalism, and a Natural Systems Worldview," *Journal of Psychology & Christianity* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 203-211.

sexual differences found in linguistic studies and biochemical research, as well as in the many analogies of sex in nature. The “chronic vigor” of this conversation requires no defense.<sup>7</sup>

In the ongoing war over the philosophy and identity of woman (who holds the key to human sexuality in general) the Church today fights on front lines, more so than she does with many other issues, chiefly because she is surrounded in every direction by esoteric and undulating opinions. Above all, her *consistency* draws suspicion and attack. Still, the complex interaction of identity-formation, biological determination, and social influence on sexuality, which feminists have brought to the frontal lobe of Western consciousness, has yet to be explored throughout all its recently won territories within the Church. The doctrinal freedom, afforded to women especially by Pope Saint John Paul II, is not unlimited, but it is liberating. Nevertheless, some faithful Catholics are still not satisfied with the idea of defining *ontological* sexual difference in *any* way, because of the risk of regressing back to a juridical or moral enforcement of gender norms. But this danger seems unlikely after the 1983 Code of Canon Law revisions and the Church’s emphases on personal freedom.<sup>8</sup> More importantly however, the Church cannot simply shirk her responsibility to remind human persons of who they are in the eyes of God, however overbearing and offensive this may feel to some. Balancing compassion with declaration is the art of sanctity. The contemporary Western obsession with sex and gender is no less sensitive an issue for the Catholic Church, since the image of God in the world is inextricably bound to the paradox of sexual complementarity, in the nuclear family, in the celibate Church, in the individual personality, and in the structure of the universe. To slip into androgyny, dualism, or uni-sexuality would be to repeat the errors of the past and to miss the fullness of communion with Trinitarian Love.

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<sup>7</sup> John Henry Newman’s final mark of a genuine development of doctrine.

<sup>8</sup> For the latter point see, Michele M. Schumacher, “John Paul II’s Theology of the Body on Trial: Responding to the Accusation of the Biological Reduction of Women.” *Nova Et Vetera (English Edition)* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 463-484.

## Women & Christian Origins

### Greco-Roman and Jewish Contexts

“No one ideology had monopolistic control of Greco-Roman culture—not the Stoics, not the Platonists, not the erotic novelists, not even, in the later period, the church.”<sup>9</sup> Christianity arose in the context of a Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultural melting-pot. Greco-Roman historical studies have established that most women of the period were set apart from male society. This picture shows men at the center of decision-making, political history, and family life. Because of the fashionable ubiquity of ancient European patriarchal customs, less known situations of similarity between men and women are the focus of this brief sketch in Greek and Roman gender relations. The focus here is to expose the complexity of ancient sexual dynamics and avoid the over-simplified stereotype of “sexism.” Many artistic works, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, depicted women participating in characteristically male activities, such as athletic competing, rival warring, and sex dominating. This trend affected much Greek mythical literature afterwards. Ovid made no distinction in the pagan worship of men and women. Sophocles gave fictional examples of young-women adopting male social roles when no men are available or willing to uphold these duties. In other texts, female goddesses possessed masculine qualities, such as physical strength, political leadership, and military prowess. Later Latin works perpetuated the equalizing of women in mythical tales. On a concrete level, in both ancient Greece and Rome, women in proximity to powerful men were often recorded as vicariously sharing their partners’ masculine qualities. Although, in the Greek tradition masculine female deities primarily represented the *otherness* of the divine realm, in later Roman times, artistic renditions of exceptional females began to mimic historical women of elite families. Far from any modern conception of equality, these Roman women, who were identified as having male qualities, “served as a convenient means of distinguishing elite women from those of lowly backgrounds,” but nevertheless, obtained a degree of socio-political power comparable to their male peers.<sup>10</sup>

The few texts written by ancient Western women (and preserved) belong to upper class Romans. Looking at these sources from the pre-Christian Mediterranean region there is an obvious

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<sup>9</sup> Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: the Christian transformation of sexual morality in late antiquity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Judith P. Hallet, “Women’s Lives in the Ancient Mediterranean,” in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 33.



imitation of the male literary style, and sometimes a comparable self-identification between men and women in the erotic sphere. But Roman women were a phenomenon distinct from Greek women. By becoming attached to a strong bloodline, a Roman woman especially could become the “same” in character as her male family members. Although the common Roman women would have been less likely to adopt male characteristics, they would not have been unaffected by the example of elite females. Wool working was one way in which females were relatively autonomous from males on every social class in this culture. It is also known that women had exclusive participation in certain female goddess cults. “Religion was a fully functional dimension of public [Roman] life (reflected by rites that all city members were expected to share), as well as an intellectual space for reflection on the most deeply held personal concerns (reflected by private, voluntary worships of a staggering variety). Many of these activities were shared by women and men, but there were some very important worships that both genders felt it was important to separate.”<sup>11</sup>

Ross Kraemer argues that there was relative continuity in gender relations across Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Christian cultures. The idea of a Christian emancipation of women from sexist Jewish traditions is an unrealistic depiction of Christ’s tame variance from male-female customs. “The stereotypes articulated by writers such as Ben Witherington, Monique Alexandre, and far too many others are inaccurate, polemical, and misleading. To the degree that they continue, consciously or unconsciously, to support and legitimate Christian anti-Judaism, they may ultimately even be dangerous.”<sup>12</sup> The constraints on female participation in public life (including domestic, educational, political, and religious roles) were not any worse in Jewish society than they were in the larger Roman culture. Although the inclusion of Jewish women in the Jesus movement was significant and represented some alteration of social norms, there is scarce evidence for a radical change in female leadership positions. In fact, the Jesus movement was probably not very attractive to Jewish women, at least not on the basis of gender liberation. The two most pressing concerns for both Jewish men and Jewish women would have been Roman oppression and familial stability, struggles which

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<sup>11</sup> Lynn R. LiDonnici, “Women’s Religions and Religious Lives in the Greco-Roman City,” in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 80.

<sup>12</sup> Ross S. Kraemer, “Jewish Women and Women’s Judaism(s) at the Beginning of Christianity,” in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 72.

Christianity would not have quelled. The majority of first century Jews continued to seek salvation and redemption in new forms of the same Old Testament faith.<sup>13</sup>

First century Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, is generally cited as a representative of misogynistic traditions in Jewish culture, grounded in an Aristotelian anthropology. However, the Jewish rabbis diverged significantly on the issue of sexual hierarchy. Philo was not entirely consistent himself, as he wrote positively of a Jewish monastic community called the *Therapeutae*, which involved men and women equally dedicated to living the contemplative philosophical life. Scholars have debated the historical validity of his record, since the community is only mentioned in one place, *On the Contemplative Life*. In the fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea interpreted Philo's *Therapeutae* as being one of the early Christian sects, but recent scholarship has argued persuasively that this community was indeed a Jewish one.<sup>14</sup> The significance of this group hinges on its contrast to the Jewish Essenes, who by most accounts were strictly male, and for the fact that it shows Jewish women (mostly from the upper class) taking initiative to become a part of the philosophical ascetic life before Christianity. Also, most of these women were probably unmarried: "virgins, whose chastity is by choice; they are advanced in age; instead of human mates, they have sought Wisdom, personified in the female form, as a spouse; and they have no children, preferring immortal, spiritual offspring to the ordinary kind."<sup>15</sup> Philo's allegorical understanding of sexuality will set the stage for the patterns of early Christian practice (Philo directly influenced early Alexandrian Christians):<sup>16</sup> "Progress is indeed nothing else than the giving up of the female gender by changing into the male, since the female gender is material, passive, corporeal and sense perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal, and more akin to mind and thought."<sup>17</sup> To remain virgin is to become male. Philo also designated virginal status to women who may not have been physically virgin: the unmarried, the widow, and especially women beyond the age of childbearing. By Philo's estimation, Sarah, wife of Abraham, was only worthy to receive "God's son," Isaac, *after* menopause, as she became a kind of born-again virgin, now (beyond the years of sexual intercourse) free of emasculate

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Ross S. Kraemer, "Monastic Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Egypt : Philo Judaeus on the Therapeutrides," *Signs* 14, no. 2 (1989): 347.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>17</sup> Philo of Alexandria, *Questions and Answers on Exodus 8:1*, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 15-6.

passions and therefore prepared for mystical union with the divine. A woman without child or husband is *less feminine and thus holier*. This sentiment is echoed in the *Gospel of Thomas* 114:

Simon Peter said to them, “Mary [of Magdala] should leave us, for females are not worthy of life.” Jesus said, “Look, I shall guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter heaven’s kingdom.”<sup>18</sup>

## New Testament Women

The Christian kerygma was delivered into a Roman society diverse in racial and religious gradations. Subtle differences in culture from city to city played a significant role in molding the reception of the proclamation of Christ. Variations in gender dynamics were certainly among these differences. It is not unimportant to emphasize that the missionary diaspora of the apostles and disciples, during and after Jesus’ human life, would have resulted in many isolated and particular cases of pastoral teaching and discipline. This variation in teaching is already obvious in the writings of the New Testament, as will be shown. Applying the Gospel message to the lives of particular differentiated communities of women would have been a delicate task, in some instances requiring the accentuation of seemingly contrary tenets, according to circumstance. This historical fact does not imply a lack of unity in the basic principles of the Christian faith, as interpreted by Jesus’ followers, but it does imply a complexity in their evolution that is too often overlooked.

As a prime example, the status of Mary Magdalene within the Gospel narratives has had a crucial role in shaping female spirituality over the centuries. It was sixth century piety that popularized the devotion to Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute – an element of a larger Western artistic-religious interest in penitent whores<sup>19</sup> – but modern feminist reconstructions of Mary have tended, instead, to emphasize her title “apostle to the apostles” as she is known in the Byzantine Church (cf. Jn 20:17-18). The term *apostolos* finds a much broader application in the New Testament than it does in later usage.

In Paul, whose writings are the earliest in the New Testament, ‘the twelve’ are primarily witnesses to the resurrection (1 Cor 15:5), and ‘apostles’ refers to a wider group among whom he counts himself (1 Cor

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<sup>18</sup> “The Gospel of Thomas,” in *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus: the definitive collection of mystical gospels and secret books about Jesus of Nazareth*, ed. and trans. Marvin W. Meyer (San Francisco: Harper, 2005). 25.

<sup>19</sup> Mary R. D’Angelo, “Reconstructing ‘Real’ Women from Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene,” in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105.

1:1; 15:8) and at least one woman (Junia; Rom 16:7). He appears to have regarded the criteria of apostleship as two. The first was to 'have seen the Lord,' that is, to have experienced a vision of the risen Christ as a call to apostleship (see Gal 1:1; 2-17). The second was to have been the founder of, or among the founding missionaries in, a community (1 Cor 9:1; 3:10; 4:15), apparently by preaching the gospel (1 Cor 1:16-17).<sup>20</sup>

In the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene appears at the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Upon her second visit to the empty tomb, Mary receives her mission from Jesus to "go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (Jn 20:17). Her essential proclamation to the disciples is simple: "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20:18). The appearances of Jesus to the disciples that immediately follow this narrative (cf. Jn 20:19-31), which may be redactor additions, stand in partial contrast to Mary Magdalene's apparition of Christ and perhaps were meant to dissuade readers from construing Mary's role as too authoritative.<sup>21</sup> A similar situation occurs in Mark 16, 9-11: "Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it." Again, some scholars deduce that the verses that follow these (focused on the Apostles) were added to downplay the role that Mary had in the proclamation of the Resurrection. This brief treatment of Mary Magdalene reveals a tension that existed in Christianity even before the Gospels were penned.

Luke records several women traveling with Jesus, naming three: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Suzanna (Lk 8:1-3). Jacqueline Lloyd has amended John Meier's three criterion for "discipleship" to show that these women, among many others, deserved this title even though it is not explicitly given them. "[1] Jesus took the initiative in calling disciples; [2] the disciples physically left home to journey with him; [3] the act of following Jesus entailed certain risks."<sup>22</sup> To say that Jesus initiated every individual act of discipleship would be too strict; it is clearly contradicted in the Gospels – for example, Andrew, James, and John follow Jesus even though his explicit calling is only to Peter (cf. Lk 5:10-11). In any case, some form of affirmation can be assumed on Jesus' part. Moreover, "In Matthew's account the plural *mathētas* is used explicitly to designate both the men *and* women who followed Jesus [Mt 12:49]... Jesus' use of both masculine and feminine terms to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 112. See, "The Gospel of Mary," in *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus*, 33-41.

<sup>22</sup> Jacqueline Lloyd, "The Women Who Followed Jesus: Part 1," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 20, no. 2 (July 2013): 9.

describe his disciples clearly indicates that his disciples were composed of men *and* women.”<sup>23</sup> The seriousness of these women’s commitment to discipleship is evident by the realities that they endured, such as constant traveling on rocky terrain and over significant elevations, in addition to leaving their homes without guarantee of food or accommodation on any given day.

Since general discipleship put women in the role of a student, the female followers of Jesus must have been a cultural phenomenon to some degree. Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, and the Jewish *Mishnah*, among other sources, present strong evidence that Jewish men of the first century would not have supported the *public* instruction of women (let alone their right to teach). “John writes that when the disciples found Jesus talking alone with a woman, they were astonished but did not ask him, ‘What do you want?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’ (John 4:27)... the idiom, ‘What do you want?’ is common across the Middle East even today and in this setting it would imply, ‘Would you like us to get rid of her for you?’”<sup>24</sup> These minor transgressions of gender normative behavior were a relatively peripheral element in Christ’s teachings. Nevertheless, these examples illustrate that the Gospels do not support the view that women are intellectually deficient. Although evidence is not in favor of females among the seventy-two, the act of “ministering” or “providing for” attributed to other New Testament women was a distinct honor transcending (*not* reestablishing) standard female roles in Jewish society. These texts set the precedent for the rite of deaconess into the middle ages.<sup>25</sup>

Thus *diakoneō* [minister] in Luke 8:3 should probably be understood to have the same meaning as in Mark 15:41. The women were acting as “go betweens,” purchasing supplies for Jesus and the twelve as they travelled with them, and doing so by drawing on their own *huparchonta* [possessions]... Like their male counterparts, these women had “downed tools” and left behind their former work. They were no longer minding children, grinding flour, or working the loom. Instead they were ministering to Jesus in roles not exclusive to women: acting as *diakonoi* or “go-betweens,” buying, selling, and moving goods, and perhaps also waiting or attending on those who ate. It is misplaced to see Luke’s description of the ministry of the women as some kind of endorsement on the part of Jesus for distinctive [hierarchal] roles for men and women.<sup>26</sup>

Although their history is opaque, such official positions of female ministry flourished in the early Church. Women dedicated to Church service are mentioned as *diakonoi* (deaconesses), *viduae*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>24</sup> Jacqueline Lloyd, “The Women Who Followed Jesus: Part II,” *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 20, no. 3 (November 2013): 25.

<sup>25</sup> L. B. Buchheimer, “Highlights in the history of the female diaconate,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 21, no. 4 (April 1950): 276-283.

<sup>26</sup> “The Women Who Followed Jesus: Part II,” 29.

(widows) or *ancillae Dei* (handmaids of God). Romans 16:1-2 reads: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cen'chre-ae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well” (RSV). The *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 3, say: “And let the deaconess be diligent in taking care of the women; but both of them ready to carry messages, to travel about, to minister, and to serve.”<sup>27</sup> Also, the secular writer Pliny referred to Christian “deaconesses” in his letter to Emperor Trajan. Although the duties of this service are unclear, it is certain that the witness and help of women was an essential and efficacious reality of the ancient Christian congregations.

Dale Martin's study of “The Corinthian Body” discusses Paul's “rhetoric of status reversal,” that is, how the weak are made strong, the despised become exalted, the uneducated become wise, and slaves are made free.<sup>28</sup> Martin identifies an inconsistency in this rhetoric when Paul is speaking of physiological hierarchy, of male over female. Influenced by Greco-Roman anthropology, Paul failed to correct the theological basis for misogynistic practices in the Church. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul spoke exclusively to men about their “virgins,” endorsing the popular belief that female virgins had to be protected from their “burning desire” by the leadership of men.<sup>29</sup> “Paul here addresses a man who would prefer to remain celibate but who must keep in mind someone else who is weaker. The logic is the same... the weakness must be accommodated.”<sup>30</sup> Because of their supposed natural inferiorities women could not be entrusted with certain Church responsibilities. Liturgical gatherings in particular were off-limits to female interruption. As Origen commented about 1 Corinthians 14:35: “It is shameful for a woman to speak in Church, whatever she says, even if she says something excellent or holy, because it comes from the mouth of a woman.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul expresses the need for the subordination of women (vv. 3, 7-10) and simultaneously declares a sense of sexual equalitarianism (vv. 11-12). Martin asserts that Paul held an ideology of androgyny, much different from the modern concept but a common Platonic viewpoint of his time. To be one in Christ was to be *male* like Christ. Many Church Fathers will concur that a woman totally devoted to Jesus, usually a virgin, will become or should be called a

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<sup>27</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* Book 3, XIX; trans. James Donaldson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886).

<sup>28</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 198.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>31</sup> Origen, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* fragment 74. In *Women in Early Christianity*, Patricia Cox Miller (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 29.

“man.” “Dennis MacDonald reads Paul's statements in a similar way, noting that in Galatians 3:28 ‘Paul claims that believers are no longer male or female inasmuch as they have become one male person—the masculine *heis* [one], not the neuter *hen*... Contrary to the opinion of many interpreters, the androgyne myth is not antiquity's answer to androcentrism; it is but one manifestation of it’.”<sup>32</sup> Even eschatological equality, which Paul seems to have granted for women, could not eliminate his belief in the ontological superiority of maleness. Besides the obvious purposes of preserving sexual modesty and maintaining gender hierarchy, there was also the stranger consideration of veiling in Corinth, which was associated with the belief in the literal physical and spiritual porousness of the female body. For this reason, women were considered especially vulnerable to (good or evil) “prophetic penetration” by angelic spirits.<sup>33</sup>

Paul's first letter to Timothy was dealing with a similar but more disruptive case of female impropriety. The main issue of the epistle was to guard against false teachers that must have been prevalent in that particular community. Paul restricts women from teaching in the Ephesus assembly, along with *men* in the following categories: single; married with no children; married with only one child; married with children too young or too indifferent or obdurate to profess faith; married with believing but disobedient children; married with children who are believing and obedient but not “respectful in all things.” Heather Celoria argues that this text was not meant to be a universal mandate for the Christian Church, but was pastoral advice for controlling a difficult community. This is evident in Paul's support of women prophets, evangelists, and deaconesses in many other places (throughout Acts and in Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 11, and Philippians 4, for example):

One might wonder why Paul would have women learn at all if he believed they were never to speak or teach. As we will see, women do indeed teach, and Paul commends them on their work as they collaborate for the sake of the gospel... 1 Timothy 2:11 tells women what they must do (learn), while 1 Timothy 2:12 states what they must not do at that time (teach): “The verb here, *epitrepō*, is present, continual tense. Paul does not say ‘I will not/never permit,’ but rather, ‘I am not [now] permitting.’” The implication is that Paul's concern is not with women teaching, but with women teaching false doctrines, the primary concern of the entire epistle in context.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *The Corinthian Body*, 231.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>34</sup> Heather Celoria. “Does 1 Timothy 2 Prohibit Women from Teaching, Leading, and Speaking in the Church?” *Priscilla Papers* 27, no. 3: 21.

## Ancient Christian Women

The early Church's theology of the body began with the question of man and woman in the "image and likeness" of God. Was this image lost by the fall or merely obscured? Is the image a separate reality from the likeness? How does the Incarnation affect this "image and likeness"? The Fathers and Doctors of the Church will take various positions on both sides of the first two questions, but will agree unanimously on the restoration of image and likeness through the salvific work of Christ.<sup>35</sup> One of the earliest and most revered theologians, Origen (d.254) adopted a Platonic anthropology that divided the creation of the good human mind/soul from the creation of the fallen human body.<sup>36</sup> This position would not be condemned until the Council of Constantinople in 553. Thus, Origenistic theologies in Early Christianity tended to think of the "image of God" as the soul of man and not his or her body (Athanasius will also locate the "image of Christ" in the human soul).

A converse party of theologians in the early centuries of Christianity considered the image of God to include the mind *and* the human flesh. Irenaeus of Lyons was the only popular defender of this view. Irenaeus held a doctrine of body-soul unity and proclaimed that Jesus is God's image in both his perfect soul and human corporeality: "Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God."<sup>37</sup> Another group, the Antiochenes, thought the image of God resided in dominion, interpreting Genesis as giving authority over creation to man but not to woman. The implications of this idea are that the image of God is in "maleness" but not the male sex per se.

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<sup>35</sup> Martien Parmentier, "Greek Patristic Foundations for a Theological Anthropology of Women in their Distinctiveness as Human Beings," *Anglican Theological Review* 84, no. 3 (June 1, 2002): 557.

<sup>36</sup> "Is it possible to suppose that the element which is after the image of God should exist in the inferior part— I mean the body— of a compound being like man, because Celsus has explained that to be made after the image of God? For if that which is after the image of God be in the body only, the better part, the soul, has been deprived of that which is after His image, and this (distinction) exists in the corruptible body—an assertion which is made by none of us. But if that which is after the image of God be in *both together*, then God must necessarily be a compound being, and consist, as it were, of soul and body, in order that the element which is after God's image, the better part, may be in the soul; while the inferior part, and that which is according to the body, may be in the body—an assertion, again, which is made by none of us." Origen, *Contra Celsus* 6,63, trans. Frederick Crombie, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

<sup>37</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5,6,1, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).



Similarly, Augustine and John Chrysostom will say that woman was the *image of the image* of God, that is, an image of man (cf. 1 Cor 11:7). Chrysostom also interpreted “image” in reference to governance over the world, not in the body or soul as such, and therefore he seems to think it absurd that God could be imaged in the human “form.”<sup>38</sup>

Basil the Great and his brother Gregory of Nyssa both defended women as equal in nature to men, but equal only in the sense of their freedom to choose good or evil. Perhaps the best of the Greek Fathers on this issue, Gregory of Nyssa located the image of God in possession of free-will. Mankind imitates the divine nature by possessing freedom, but is distinct from God because God is immutable. The natural appetency for “moral beauty” is also part of this image, as it draws man to God, but man may freely follow it or deem it an illusion.<sup>39</sup> Basil also will not accept the *moral* inferiority of woman, as asserted by the Platonic concept of a different female bodily nature, less than male but more than beast. The male sex is not beatified alone, because male and female have a single nature, they are one “image” and one “virtue.” Scripture often speaks of “man” only because “it sufficed, since the nature is one, to indicate the whole by the leading part.”<sup>40</sup>

Although there was disagreement about the “location” of the image of God – Alexandrians tended to be spiritualistic, placing the image in the soul, while the Antiochenes were more pastoral, placing the image in the will – “the connection of the image of God with the human body is rejected explicitly by all the patristic writers as anthropomorphous... the [Greek] fathers unanimously agree that the visible sex of men and women has absolutely nothing to do with the image of God.”<sup>41</sup> Likewise, Jesus’ maleness was not considered a parameter to his imaging of God (cf. Col 1:15).<sup>42</sup> Male and female are not metaphors for God’s reality. Thus, most of the Greek fathers considered Christ’s image within his divine nature only, although Irenaeus hinted at a ‘sacramental’ revelation within Christ’s human nature.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Parmentier, 562.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations* 21,1 (CCEL 490), trans. Philip Schaff.

<sup>40</sup> Parmentier, 567.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

<sup>42</sup> Constatinos Yokarinis, “A Patristic Basis for a Theological Anthropology of Women in their Distinctive Humanity,” *Anglican Theological Review* 84, no. 3 (June 1, 2002): 604-6.

<sup>43</sup> “And then, again, this Word was manifested when the Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] *shown*; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created, Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed both these: for He both showed forth

God as “Father” and “Son” are better understood as positions of eternal origin and subsistent relations, rather than as super-gendered personalities. The Godhead and Christ’s *human* nature contain all that is possibly feminine as well as masculine. Christ’s maleness is pre-lapsarian and serves mainly to refer back to his Sonship and to God’s Fatherhood. “The fathers unanimously accept that the incarnate Logos has, in his perfect human nature, assumed both male and female. If we do not accept this fact, then according to Gregory of Nazianzen ‘what is not assumed is not saved.’ In other words, women must be excluded from the soteriological results of the incarnate God-Logos, and consequently the dogma of Chalcedon must be discarded!”<sup>44</sup> Gregory of Nazianzen asserts that Christ “remodels” humanity into a new “form” that cannot distinguish between the “badges of flesh.”<sup>45</sup> Gregory of Nyssa wrote this important passage:

"Go forth daughters of Sion, and behold King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals and in the day of the gladness of his heart". . . see the crown" on the king's head which his mother placed on him according to the prophet, "He has placed on his head a crown of precious stone" (Ps. 20:4). No one can adequately grasp the terms pertaining to God. For example, "mother" is mentioned in place of "father." Both terms mean the same, because there is neither male nor female in God (for how can anything transitory like this be attributed to God? But when we are one in Christ, we are divested of the signs of this difference along with the old human). Therefore, every name equally indicates God's ineffable nature; neither can "male" nor "female" defile God's pure nature.<sup>46</sup>

The duality and ambiguity of the ancient Church’s understanding of female theological anthropology is demonstrated by the tension between sexual equality in Christ spiritually and differentiation of bodily roles practically. The Fathers cited thus far would not ignore the physiological differences between men and women, yet they struggled concernedly to uphold the oneness of human nature. The premise most commonly enlisted to ease the debate was that *man and woman before the fall were free of sexual hierarchy and gender difference*, and therefore, Christ has already or will eschatologically restore such a state. Tertullian (d.222) was the first major thinker to take a different view in this infamous passage among others:

And do you not know that you [women] are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of

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the image truly, since He became Himself what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5,16,2, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

<sup>44</sup> Yokarinis, 603.

<sup>45</sup> Gregory of Nazianzen. *Oration 7 23*, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 7*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894).

<sup>46</sup> Parmentier, 579.

that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert— that is, death— even the Son of God had to die.<sup>47</sup>

Yet for Tertullian, women had clearly distinct roles in proclaiming the kingdom of God, just as they had a distinct guilt and punishment. He acknowledged women in their own cultural domains, hinting at some sense in which women were creatively autonomous.<sup>48</sup> The Christian woman should become a light to the world by visibly standing out from the world, especially in modesty and virginity. Instead of being ornamented as a worldly woman might, a Christian woman should wear the mark of devotion to Jesus. In Carthage, there was apparently a practice of virgins who kept their heads uncovered as a sign of continence. This was considered by Tertullian inimical to chastity, since it attracted the attention of men, with their honors and embraces which could quickly turn into sexual relations.<sup>49</sup> Tertullian is unique in his time for defending female virginity as a state of realized womanhood (i.e. female maturity in the faith) rather than as a way of becoming spiritually “male.” This was contrary to the more popular theology of Origen that considered gender differentiation a post-lapsarian phenomenon, as if womanhood and sin came into the world at the same time and were conquered at the same time. Instead, for Tertullian, virginity was the original state of woman as female. Wife and virgin were both called “woman,” but the virgin could tempt the angels (cf. Gen 6:1-5; 1 Cor 11:10), because she was in a state of pristine womanhood, while the wife could not because she was “defiled.” Yet, no such power, for this same good or evil, belongs to man as male.

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<sup>47</sup> Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, I, 1, trans. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 8, 13.

<sup>49</sup> “The virgins of men go about, in opposition to the virgins of God, with front quite bare, excited to a rash audacity; and the semblance of *virgins* is exhibited by women who have the power of asking somewhat from *husbands*, not to say such a request as that (forsooth) their rivals— all the more free in that they are the hand-maids of Christ alone — may be surrendered to them. We are scandalized, they say, because others walk otherwise (than we do); and they prefer being scandalized to being provoked (to modesty). A scandal, if I mistake not, is an example not of a good thing, but of a bad, tending to sinful edification. Good things scandalize none but an evil mind. If modesty, if bashfulness, if contempt of glory, anxious to please God alone, are good things, let women who are scandalized by such good learn to acknowledge their own evil. For what if the incontinent withal say they are scandalized by the continent? Is continence to be recalled? And, for fear the multinubists be scandalized, is monogamy to be rejected? Why may not these latter rather complain that the petulance, the impudence, of ostentatious virginity is a scandal to *them*? Are therefore chaste virgins to be, for the sake of these marketable creatures, dragged into the church, blushing at being recognised in public, quaking at being unveiled, as if they had been invited as it were to rape? For they are no less unwilling to suffer even this. Every public exposure of an honourable virgin is (to her) a suffering of rape: and yet the suffering of carnal violence is the less (evil), because it comes of natural office.” Tertullian, “On the Veiling of Virgins,” 3, trans. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

Saint Perpetua (d.203), twenty-two year old martyr of Carthage and contemporary of Tertullian, is one of the only female writers whose work has survived from antiquity. Perpetua and Felicity are the best examples of orthodox female charismatic leadership in the early Church. Perpetua is especially Christ-like in relation to her father, who effeminately begs her to turn-back from her “passion” or martyrdom. Her “theology of the family of God” is notably feminine in character and makes a significant contribution to early Christian identity.<sup>50</sup> Perpetua’s irresistible personality typifies the contrast between women as true prophets and the later descriptions of women as temptresses.<sup>51</sup> Although some of the passages in *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* appear to be the redaction of a Montanist editor, it is unlikely that Perpetua and Felicity incurred any heretical label in their time. A movement spanning from the Second to Seventh Centuries, the term “Montanism” was not used until the fourth century, but before that was simply called the “New Prophecy.” Montanus and his female companions, Priscilla and Maximilla, claimed that “the Holy Spirit was preaching discipline and an end to laxity: no remarriage, even after the death of a spouse, more rigorous fasting, and veils down to the waist for females, not the light head-coverings typical of Roman women.”<sup>52</sup> Tertullian was this heresy’s most infamous adherent. Likewise, Irenaeus defended the “New Prophecy” well into the 180s, though he did not die in heresy. The Montanism debate, which allowed for new “revelations” to equal if not surpass apostolic tradition, eventually pressured the Church into closing the canon of Scripture and defining the doctrine of finished public Revelation.<sup>53</sup> Priscilla herself may even have been the originator of Montanism according to Anne Jensen, but even if this was not the case, Priscilla and Maximilla were held in the same high esteem as Montanus himself – evidence of the public influence women in

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<sup>50</sup> Sara Parvis, “Perpetua,” *Expository Times* 120, no. 8 (August 2009): 107-9.

<sup>51</sup> “If Perpetua is not the early church’s greatest theologian, what she has going for her is yet something fairly rare: we have convincing portraits of both her family and her public life, and they add up. The indomitable, loving, caring, playful character we meet in her diary and her dreams is the indomitable, loving, caring, playful character we meet in Satorius’ dream and the narrative of her passion, though inevitably in different measures. It was a character which clearly brought a great deal to the Carthaginian church she was joining, short as was her time as a baptized Christian. And in her notion of the family of God, which she both fervently believed in and passionately tried to build, I think we do find a genuine and characteristic theology. Perpetua and her narrator clearly both believed they belonged to a charismatic church, full of visions and deeds of power, as well as prophecy and the call to bear witness with one’s life.” *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Christianity may have had at assorted times and places in Church history. Tertullian's record is telling in this regard.<sup>54</sup>

“What ancient writers said about Priscilla and Maximilla in the first decades of the New Prophecy, contrasts markedly with what was said of them in later generations, and by people who had never encountered them.”<sup>55</sup> As in the case of Perpetua and Felicity, Maximilla and Pricilla were most likely part of an orthodox movement that became historically entangled with heterodox practices in later centuries. Eusebius of Caesarea refers to Montanus and Maximilla as “pseudo-prophets” leading the Church astray through false “chatterings.”<sup>56</sup> Women with charismatic gifts may have been seen as threats to some male clergy, as is clear in later cases of female prophetesses becoming “bishops” and performing certain “sacraments.” Montanism’s demonization in later centuries was accompanied by attempts to exorcize the pseudo-prophets, females specifically, and several scholars are convinced this heresy had probably become a strongly gendered issue. This is apparent in Cyril of Jerusalem’s “temperance” while preaching about Montanus to a largely female audience.<sup>57</sup>

Several scholars refer to the “ambivalence” of teachings on women in the early Church, most of which come from the Fathers and Doctors. This phenomenon has to do with two different strains of Scriptural rhetoric about females: either 1) women need to be subordinated to men because of Original Sin<sup>58</sup> or 2) women are the supreme embodiment of holiness and inspiration for

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<sup>54</sup> “For, seeing that we acknowledge spiritual *charismata*, or gifts, we too have merited the attainment of the prophetic gift, although coming after John (the Baptist). We have now among us a sister whose lot it has been to be favoured with sundry gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church: she converses with angels, and sometimes even with the Lord; she both sees and hears mysterious communications; some men's hearts she understands, and to them who are in need she distributes remedies. Whether it be in the reading of Scriptures, or in the chanting of psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services matter and opportunity are afforded to her of seeing visions.” Tertullian, *Treatise on the Soul*, 9, trans. Peter Holmes, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

<sup>55</sup> Christine Trevett, “Gender, Authority and Church History: A Case Study of Montanism,” *Feminist Theology* 17, 9-24 (January 1, 1998): 13.

<sup>56</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church*, Book 5 16, trans. G. A. Williamson (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965). 217-221.

<sup>57</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 16.8, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894).

<sup>58</sup> “I would rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than dwell with an evil wife... From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.” - Sirach 25:16;24 (RSV)

men.<sup>59</sup> Although Eve is depicted as the instigator of man's sin, she is also called *ezer* or "helper," a term used elsewhere to signify divine assistance.<sup>60</sup> Christ did not include women among his chosen twelve, but neither did he include any male in his genetic biology. God required a *divine* Person to perfect the male body, but Mary was able to perfect her female body as a *human* person. Thus, some feminists will go so far as to call the Annunciation a "lesbian conception of Christ."<sup>61</sup> In every case of sexual differentiation there is an equal exchange of gifts. A less drastic dichotomy in women's roles is found in the ideals of contemplative versus active discipleship. Drawing from the New Testament traditions and the traditions that revered the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Bernadette Brooton claimed that there were, at least, two off-shoots of Pauline tradition (perhaps emanating from pluriform strands of Jewish practice) in regard to women.<sup>62</sup>

"One would note that, on the one hand, Paul accepted women as colleagues (Rom 16:1-12; Phil 4:2-3; Phlm 2), believed that gender distinctions cease in Christ (Gal 3:28), accepted women's prophesying activity (1 Cor 11:5), and saw the celibate state as an option for women (1 Cor 7), but that the same Paul required women to wear a veil when praying or prophesying and employed a subordinationist theology and anthropology to justify the practice (1 Cor 11:2-16), prohibited divorce (1 Cor 7:10-11), viewed love relations between women as the result of idolatry (Rom 1:26), and possibly believed that women should be silent in the church assembly (1 Cor 14:34-36 – if this is not an interpolation)."<sup>63</sup>

If one looked at the Canon of Scripture alone, it would appear that subordination to men eventually overtook freedom for prophecy, as the emphasized role of women in the Church – the later the epistle, the more sexist the theology. However, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* painted a different picture of female praxis. Thecla was a prophetess, evangelist, missionary, and spiritual leader, who was thought of in later centuries as a close companion, even spiritual lover, of Paul. These two

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<sup>59</sup> "A modest wife adds charm to charm, and no balance can weigh the value of a chaste soul. Like the sun rising in the heights of the Lord, so is the beauty of a good wife in her well-ordered home." "He who acquires a wife gets his best possession, a helper fit for him and a pillar of support. Where there is no fence, the property will be plundered; and where there is no wife, a man will wander about and sigh." – Sirach 26:15-16; 36:24-25 See also, Proverbs 31:10-31.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 15-16. See also, Pia Francesca De Solenni, *A hermeneutic of Aquinas's Mens through a Sexually Differentiated Epistemology: towards an understanding of woman as imago Dei* (Roma: Apollinare studi, 2000), 12-13.

<sup>61</sup> "As Sojourner Truth scolded the clerics who opposed her speaking in public: 'Where your Christ come from, honey? Where your Christ come from? He come from God and a woman. Man ain't had nothing to do with it!' Nothing is beyond God, certainly not a lesbian conception of Christ." Sian Taylder, "Our lady of the libido: towards a Marian theology of sexual liberation?," *Feminist Theology* 12, no. 3 (May 1, 2004): 364.

<sup>62</sup> See Marjorie Suzan Lehman, "Dressing and Undressing the High Priest: A View of Talmudic Mothers," *Nashim: A Journal Of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* no. 1 (2014): 52-74.

<sup>63</sup> Bernadette J. Brooton, "Early Christian Women and their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 85.

strains of Pauline tradition about the theology of women in Christianity might also have incorporated Biblical contrasts such as that between the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, or between Martha and Mary of Bethany, or between Prisca the wife and Junia the “apostle.”<sup>64</sup> In each pairing, the former and latter correlate loosely to conservative and progressive female positions in society, both finding support in the epistles of Paul. This theme will translate into the development of the theological difference between the married and the celibate woman, with the important exception of Mary the Mother of Jesus. Mary, as wife, mother, *and* virgin would create *a very important confusion* about the theology of marriage and femininity, with implications for the development of these doctrines in later centuries. Noteworthy is the fact that the Holy Family would effectively preserve the equal dignity of both a vocation to marriage or to celibacy.

## Women in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

### Fourth Century Reform

The fourth century was a transformative era in Christian history. Emperor Constantine’s conversion to the Christian faith significantly altered the hierarchal functioning of the Church and put at its disposal the resources of Rome. Although not immediately following Constantine, the adoption of Christianity as the official Roman religion would begin the identity transformation from a Church of martyrs to a Church of ascetics. Notwithstanding supernatural influence, the transition into a clerical and monastic locus of spirituality followed naturally from the Christian tradition of philosophy as a preparation for death.<sup>65</sup> As it became clear that the end of the earth was not yet at hand, Christians sought for a new means of setting themselves apart from the pagans. With the change in the Church’s relationship to the world, after Constantine, came a change in the Church’s relationship to women. This period realized a depreciation of female spirituality, which is not to say however, that there was a shortage of female vocations. In fact, female virgins came to possess the same degree of cultural capital as the martyrs had held before them. In part, for this very reason, ascetics were moved from urban environments to rural locales, a visible sign of a theological shift in focus from active to contemplative life. From the end of the fourth century through the Carolingian Renaissance, women were authoritatively and systematically separated, spatially and politically, from the lives of priests and monks, and female asceticism came under tight clerical jurisdiction.

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<sup>64</sup> “Early Christian Women and their Cultural Context,” 80-81.

<sup>65</sup> *Women in the Early Church*. 115.

The Councils of Elvira (306) and Ancyra (314) reveal that the Church was already enforcing quasi-legal obligations on women who publicly professed their intention to remain virgins, even before the full force of the Empire was behind these implementations. “Those, men or women, who have proclaimed virginity, and then revoked their proclamation shall be subjected to the regulation concerning those who married for a second time. We prohibit those, who live together with men as if they were their sisters, from doing so.”<sup>66</sup> These strictures on celibacy were perhaps rather absolutist, but they also reflected the soaring esteem in which ascetics were held. Virgins who fell into sexual relations with their clerical counterparts were deeply scandalous to the Church. Like the martyrs before them, these celibates had a privileged status in Christian society. For this reason, the abandonment of celibacy was experienced like a betrayal within the community. Of course, these laws were more odious for women than men, because of the limited sphere of women’s influence and their inability to subvert male surveillance. Contrarily, the Council of Gangra (340-41) condemned the teaching of Eustathius of Sebaste, who ultimately *forced* celibacy on his followers, and allowed women to dress as men and live among them as if sexless. This illustrates the tension and confusion in the Church about the idea of “maleness” and its potential appropriation by women.

The organization of ascetic communities was in no small part inspired by the sister of Basil the Great (d.379) and Gregory of Nyssa (d.395). Macrina the younger (d.379), was consistently referred to as “teacher” by her more famous brothers. Basil would eventually compose the first mainstream regulations for religious communities, in turn inspiring Augustine of Hippo (d.430) and Benedict of Nursia (d.547) in their respective monastic rules. But Macrina chose to live ascetically within her own family before these brothers embraced the philosophical life in imitation of her example. According to Gregory of Nyssa’s *Vita Macrina*, an angel appeared to Macrina’s mother, while she was pregnant with her, and named her daughter “Thecla.” This reveals both the prominence and reverence for the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and also the “maleness” attributed to Macrina’s disposition for celibacy and penance. “If indeed she should be styled woman, for I do not know whether it is fitting to designate her by her sex, who so surpassed her sex.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: the Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. W.K. Lowther Clarke (Great Britain: Richard Clay & Sons, 1916).



Basil greatly esteemed female ascetics, giving them the first form of ecclesial status and formal vows, also presenting them as the ideal models of the Church that is “Bride of Christ.” In his ascetical instructions, Basil called for a female elder to be placed over a community of women who lived apart from the men, much like his sister Macrina had done with the religious women who came to follow her. Basil “affirms that women have surpassed men in the pursuit of piety, that in the sphere of the soul [spirit] there is no question of a ‘stronger’ and ‘weaker’ sex. In his spirited defense of female asceticism one cannot but feel that the person of Macrina and the example of Annisa [her religious community] inform all that he has to say.”<sup>68</sup> Two elements in particular mark Basil the Great’s reforms: the move of ascetic communities from urban environments to the countryside to avoid entanglement in too many worldly affairs, and the separation of men and women into separate areas to avert difficulties between the sexes. Basil also avoided the psychological risks of solitude by promoting community life rather than life in isolation.

The fourth century ascetic reforms affected women in several ways. Women who were in “spiritual marriages” or “living as sisters” with celibate men (*syneisaktism* or *subintroductae*), were restricted from these relationships, sometimes because they had taken up “male” characteristics and duties, and other times for falling into sexual sin. Female virgins from both sides had played a large role in Arius’ public controversies, but the role of women in Church politics was also diminished in this period as celibate women were migrated out of urban areas and set apart from priests. At the same time, a shift away from the Origenistic theology of the body was occurring, which saw femininity, though not the soul of the female, as a lower rung on the hierarchy of human spiritual purity. Athanasius, in his influential defense of Jesus’ Incarnation, had focused on the mediation of the *Logos* and the necessity of submission to Christ. Origen’s spirituality had encouraged emboldened women to reach beyond their gender, but the spread of Athanasius’ writings promoted the virtue of humility and the honor of taking the lower place. This was an important rationale for the subordination of women in Christian society. As a positive and not unrelated aside, the Council of Ephesus (431) declared Mary as the true mother of Jesus and thus *Theotokos* (God-bearer). This Mariological doctrine preserved a correct Christology: one divine Person, Jesus, possessing two natures, human and divine. This teaching is important to note because it reveals a certain ontological interdependence between the sexes in the natural world, so that even in the Incarnation a kind of

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<sup>68</sup> Anna Silvas. *Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 57.

male-female “one-flesh” union was necessary, that is to say, Jesus receives his fleshly nature entirely from Mary of Nazareth.

## Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine

Although well-known for his piercing sarcasm, seeming misogyny, and disparagement of marriage, the saint and doctor Jerome (d.420) had a following of virgins whom he deeply loved and respected. From letters to his close friend Marcella it is evident that celibacy had become somewhat fashionable for upper class Roman Christian women in his day. Marcella had an immense intellect, which Jerome considered to have exhausted his own knowledge. She taught in a school where two of Jerome’s most famous virgin friends attended, Paula and Eustochium.<sup>69</sup> Jerome spares no words in praising these women, especially Marcella: “Who ever heard a slander on Marcella that deserved any belief at all? Or who ever believed one without being guilty of malice and defamation? No, she put the Gentiles to confusion by showing them the nature of Christian womanhood, which her conscience and her bearing both showed.”<sup>70</sup> In another letter, to Eustochium, Jerome says these famous words: “Death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary. And thus the gift of virginity has been bestowed most richly upon women, seeing that it has had its beginning from a woman.”<sup>71</sup> However, in other letters, especially *Against Jovinian*, Jerome shows a profound distrust of females. In Jerome, one witnesses the patristic pattern of placing femininity on the poles of both good and evil extremes.

John Chrysostom (d.407) attributed women’s restriction from (and inability to) teach as a result of the Fall, woman being deceived and man not (cf. 1 Tim 2:12).<sup>72</sup> One of the important aspects of this belief was manifested in his rhetoric against spiritual marriage. John Chrysostom thought *syneisaktism* posed an unavoidable threat to vowed chastity but also that it concealed a deeper problem, namely, that women living with monks or clerics, free from the ordering of family life and unimpeded by conjugal relations, had the potential to disrupt patriarchal rule. “He expressed

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<sup>69</sup> Mike Aquilina, *The Witness of Early Christian Women: Mothers of the Church* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2014), Chapter 4, Section 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Mothers of the Church*, Chapter 4, Section 3.

<sup>71</sup> Jerome, *Letter 22: To Eustochium* 21, trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 6*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893).

<sup>72</sup> John Chrysostom, *Discourse 4 on Genesis 1*, trans. Patricia Cox Miller, in *Women in Early Christianity*, 30.

concern that clerics would become womanly, too comfortable with gossip and distaffs, while the virgins would, in turn, become masculine and overbearing. Chrysostom's fears may be an inflected acknowledgment that the pristine understanding of the *vita angelica* [holiness as spiritual maleness] had not yet been entirely stifled by clerical strictures.”<sup>73</sup> The traditional ‘chains’ of marriage as well as clerical rule over female ascetics kept women remote from public life, while *syneisaktism* perhaps allowed too much female entanglement in ecclesial affairs.

Thus, the fifth century saw a decline in female spirituality, including the office of deaconess. Deaconesses were fairly common in the early Church, but the office was dissolving in the West in the fifth century (it remained vibrant in the East through the ninth century). Even by the end of “the fourth century in the Western Church, deaconesses were not included in the official list of ordained offices. In 441, the Council of Orange forbade the ordination of deaconesses in its region. The Synod of Nîmes declared that the very idea of women claiming to be deacons was so indecent that it would invalidate the whole idea of ordination. In 494, Pope Gelasius wrote a letter to numerous bishops on the need to restrict women ministering at the altar.”<sup>74</sup> The most famous *positive* case of an early Church deaconess was the highly venerated Olympias, friend of Chrysostom.

The female offices of “deaconess” and “widow” were already well established and regulated at the Council of Nicaea. The station of widowhood is mentioned also by Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Hippolytus, and the *Didascalia apostolorum* (the *Didascalia apostolorum* and its derivative *Apostolic Constitutions*, which both forbade that a woman confer Baptism). “At the Council of Chalcedon (451) it was stipulated that the deaconess should be at least forty years of age and a celibate (c. 15, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Council*, 1:94). This would encourage the conflation of the two offices [of widow and deaconess]—especially considering the age stipulation for the church's inscribed widows, which the pastoral epistles placed at sixty (1 Tim. 5.9).”<sup>75</sup> Both the deaconess and the widow were often compared with the prophetess Anna (cf. Luke 2.36–37), “whose alleged seven years in marriage was balanced by almost eighty years of chaste widowhood ‘mixing days and nights with prayers and fasts’ until she received the gift of prophecy on the occasion of Christ's

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<sup>73</sup> Dyan Elliot, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: metaphor and embodiment in the lives of pious women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press), 154.

<sup>74</sup> Laura Swan, “Deaconesses of the Early Church,” in *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001).

<sup>75</sup> *Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 315.

presentation in the temple.<sup>76</sup> Hence, widows and deaconesses receded into obscurity through overly cautious hierarchal discipline and theological ambiguity.

Augustine (d.430) is often contrasted to Jerome for his strong defense of the good of marriage. Even though Augustine shares the view of his time, that females are inferior to males, he enjoins Christian men to love women for their holy potential.<sup>77</sup> Augustine told Proba the widow that the main responsibility of widows was to set the example of prayer for all other Christians.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, in the *Confessions*, Augustine admires his mother, Saint Monica's, superior womanly patience and humility. Augustine was the first Church father to suggest that sexual relations were intended even before the Fall. He developed a theory of nuptial union that made marriage good in itself, apart from the conjugal debt and the procreation of children. Nevertheless, because of the Fall, Augustine thought the generative organs were no longer subject to the will, and became humanity's greatest disfiguration. Arousal itself became lustful and violent after sin. Therefore, sexual intercourse without the aim of begetting children was a venial sin. Augustine is considered to be an indirect supporter of spiritual marriage as well, because of his idealization of the marriage of Mary and Joseph and his pastoral advice allowing the gradual transition of married couple into celibate unions. In *City of God*, Augustine attempts to equalize men and women in certain respects, stating that, post-lapse, woman blames the devil but man blames woman, so both sin in pride. Mostly, men and women are equal because of their interdependence:

For no sooner had Scripture said, male and female created He them, (Genesis 1:27-28) than it immediately continues, and God blessed them, and God said unto them, increase, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, etc. And though all these things may not unsuitably be interpreted in a spiritual sense, yet male and female cannot be understood of two things in one man, as if there were in him one thing which rules, another which is ruled; but it is quite clear that they were created male and female, with bodies of different sexes, for the very purpose of begetting offspring, and so increasing, multiplying, and replenishing the earth; and it is great folly to oppose so plain a fact... It is certain, then, that from the first men were created, as we see and know them to be now, of two sexes, male and female, and that they are called one, either on account of the matrimonial union, or on account of the origin of the woman, who was created from the side of the man. And it is by this original example, which God Himself instituted, that the apostle admonishes all husbands to love their own wives in particular (Ephesians 5:25).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Warren Richardson, *Women and Religion: the original sourcebook of women in Christian thought* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 60.

<sup>78</sup> Augustine, *Epistle to Proba*, trans. Philip Schaff, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), 1:459-469.

<sup>79</sup> Augustine, *City of God* Book XIV, Chapter 22, trans. Marcus Dods, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 2*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

Augustine is a remarkable figure in the theology of sexuality because he simultaneously held views of gender *equality* in contemplation and celibacy, female *subordination* in temporal thought and social life, and gender *complementarity*, before the Fall in self-knowledge and in the eschatological Resurrection of the body.<sup>80</sup> “And as in his soul there is one power which rules by directing, another made subject that it might obey, so also for the man was corporeally made a woman, who, in the mind of her rational understanding should also have a like nature, in the sex, however, of her body should be in like manner subject to the sex of her husband, as the appetite of action is subjected by reason of the mind, to conceive the skill of acting rightly. These things we behold, and they are severally good, and all very good.”<sup>81</sup> Again, one witnesses in Augustine an inconsistency which could not yet be reconciled: how can woman at once be equal in nature and inferior in body?

## The Middle Ages

With the fall of the Roman Empire, and the rise of the Frankish kings, there developed an ever more rigid divide between the hierarchy of priests and Bishops and the subordination of virgins, monks, and laity. Any confusion of these social boundaries was discouraged and often prosecuted, as in the case of married priests who were forcibly separated from their wives.<sup>82</sup> The Carolingian culture reinstated sexist ideologies partitioning the world into three orders of *men*: priests, soldiers, and farmers. The Church hierarchy began micromanaging marriages and vows in this period, allowing female social distinction only to pure consecrated virgins. Married and widowed women were considered lesser brides than the ‘Brides of Christ,’ and the positions of deaconess and consecrated widow were collapsed into an undifferentiated status of the formerly married:

In 567, the Council of Tours argued vociferously against the veiling of widows. “Everybody knows that a blessing of the widow is never to be read in any canon law books, because her proposition [of chastity] alone ought to suffice for her.” The council goes on to cite Avitus, bishop of Vienne: “the consecration of widows, who are called deaconesses, we totally abrogate from all our religious practices.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. - A.D. 1250*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1997), 218, 220.

<sup>81</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* Book XIII, Chapter 32, trans. J.G. Pilkington, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 1*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

<sup>82</sup> Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1993), 101-102.

<sup>83</sup> From the Council of Tours (567). *Bride of Christ goes to Hell*, 66.

The infamous couple, Abelard (d.1142) and Heloise (d.1164) are important figures of this era for their theology of sex polarity and complementarity. Abelard believed that men were superior to women in nature, soul, mind, and body, but also held that men and women were equal in reason and access to grace. Moreover, reminiscent of Basil, Abelard said that women were superior in their ability to respond to grace and live the religious life.<sup>84</sup> Abelard also defended the *Ordo sanctimonialium* of deaconesses, and identified abbesses as the successors of this ancient order, equal to the male order of abbot. “This understanding followed a venerable tradition that stood in stark contrast to the more recent claims of the *Glossa ordinaria*, Gratian and Peter the Lombard that the only true sacramental orders were the subdiaconate, the diaconate and the presbyterate.”<sup>85</sup> Another vital contribution, Abelard’s *Ethics*, in the treatise of pure intention, elevated the interior life of Christians above outer self-expression. Thus, philosophers and lawmakers were forced to think twice before assuming that exterior appearances always revealed interior states. “In other words, God could judge a layperson according to the proverbial road not taken: a monastic career never embarked upon, a martyrdom never endured.”<sup>86</sup> For women, these changes resulted in increased zeal for spiritual perfection, among laity and religious alike.

Hildegard of Bingen (d.1179) developed the most thorough female theology of sexuality in pre-modern history. Before Hildegard no complete and consistent philosophy of sexual complementarity existed, that is, a theory which encapsulated materiality, rationality, and spirituality under the same logic.<sup>87</sup> Whereas, Aristotle associated man with the higher elements, fire and air, and woman with the lower elements, water and earth, Hildegard associated women with the middle two, air and water, and man with the two poles, fire and earth. Hildegard also said that *both* male and female souls had masculine and feminine elements, the difference being their equal but distinct starting points – men should develop their feminine side and females their masculine side. In terms of the body, Hildegard held that the sexual organs of man and woman were altered after the Fall, and beforehand Eve would have conceived as the Virgin Mary did, providing her own seed without man’s bodily assistance. Although she kept to Aristotle’s false embryology, Hildegard still considered woman’s post-lapsarian role in fertilization to be equal in value to man’s provision of the seed. Drawing on the medieval concept of the four humours, Hildegard also developed complementary

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<sup>84</sup> *Aristotelian Revolution*, 271.

<sup>85</sup> Gary Macy, “Heloise, Abelard and the Ordination of Abbesses,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 1, 2006), 16.

<sup>86</sup> *Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 133.

<sup>87</sup> *Aristotelian Revolution*, 408-09.

models of male and female personalities. Men and women are equal in ability to know themselves, but knowledge of self inevitably leads to the recognition of physical and psychological sexual differentiation. Because of her experience of co-sexual relations in the double monastery, Hildegard surmised that the same characteristics which inclined chaste male-female friendships also allowed for successful marriages.<sup>88</sup> Hildegard held a complimentary view of male and female social roles as well. She believed the cloister was not meant to keep religious women away from the world, but to keep the world away from religious women. She maintained the hierarchy of male rule and female obedience, but also established a complimentary hierarchy that favored women: “a much greater position of quiescence.”<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, obedience must be freely undertaken to be virtuous at all (thus the authority figure only holds half the power), and, in certain cases of injustice, virtue may rightly call one to overthrow obedience for a greater good.

The twelfth century saw a renewal in appreciation for feminine characteristics and therefore for sexual complementarity. Consequently, the number of female saints would triple by the fifteenth century, while women would take over the majority of canonizations from the laity. Bernard of Clairvaux’s (d.1153) commentary on the Song of Songs famously proclaimed the femininity of the soul in relationship to God and inspired much of the spirituality of the Middle Ages, especially by making the title *Sponsa Christi* attractive and applicable to non-virgins, the married, and even men. In his rebuttal of the dualist Cathars, who hated marriage, Bernard responded: “Take from the Church the honourable estate of marriage and the purity of the marriage-bed, and you will surely fill it with concubinage, incest, masturbation, effeminacy, homosexuality—in short, with every kind of filthiness.”<sup>90</sup> The Christian spirit of the thirteenth century was one of penitence, a fruit of the mendicant orders, and this spirit resurrected ancient practices of lay asceticism. The penitential zeitgeist was particularly beneficial to women since its rigors often put men in a position of sympathy for feminine submission and the virtue of obedience, even to the point of Church leaders acknowledging that a favorable disposition toward grace was an inherently female quality.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>90</sup> *Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 112.

<sup>91</sup> *Spiritual Marriage*, 200.

## The Fourth Lateran Council

Lateran IV provides a clear picture of the difficulties that faced the medieval Church. Heretical anti-sacramentalism was countered by the council's reaffirmation of the Eucharistic presence of Christ and by the institution of the first mandates for private confession (to a priest). Both practices, but especially confession, would become bound up with the development of the inquisitional procedure. This resulted from an era obsessed with the "proofs" for sanctity as well as for heresy. By this line of reasoning, the seal of the confessional was not unfrequently broken, for the "welfare of the Church," especially during the heights of medieval heresy.<sup>92</sup> Because women always stood outside the 'orthodox safeguards of ordination,' their role in propagating orthodoxy among the common people would become central. Thus, female spirituality at this time advanced under the sponsorship of the male clergy. Pope Gregory IX (d.1241), famous patron of Francis of Assisi, also reinforced both the Beguine female ascetical movement and the cult of Elizabeth of Hungary.<sup>93</sup> The support of pious woman (and the employment of their celebrity) was part of an anti-heretical program, originally focused against the anti-sexual and anti-mother Cathars. The Beguines were an ascetical group of (mostly) holy women whose piety fed upon the sacraments of penance and communion. These women tended to have specific priests who became their religious mentors and spiritual spouses. "A number of these clerics would eventually honor their spiritual patronesses through hagiography and related pastoral media, and it is to these sources that we are largely indebted for information about the early Beguines. The corpus as a whole paints a fascinating picture of an erotically charged climate through which women's spiritual intimacy with the heavenly bridegroom would overflow into their relations with the priesthood."<sup>94</sup>

Elizabeth of Hungary (d.1231) marks the start of a medieval trend of taking vows to obey one's confessor, a practice paralleled by concurrent legislation requiring a wife's deference to her husband, putting first confessor then husband over her as God's proxies. In Elizabeth's case her confessor was also the papal inquisitor, and her obedience to him frequently pressed beyond the limits of reason.<sup>95</sup> The violent treatment of Elizabeth and her profound mortifications became an important "proof" for her sanctity but also offered a paradigmatic justification for the inquisitional procedure.

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<sup>92</sup> Dyan Elliot, *Proving Woman: Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), Chapter 1, Section 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Proving Woman*, Chapter 2, Section 1, para. 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 183.

<sup>95</sup> *Proving Woman*, Chapter 3.



The cultural exaltation of suffering and tribulation that followed, thus created a dangerous desensitization to persecution and torture. This precarious situation naturally became more acutely threatening for women than for men, because of women's inherently lower position in society:

The relationship between Conrad [her confessor] and Elisabeth is both an exemplum for the times and a harbinger of things to come. Although an extreme case, it nevertheless functions as a poignant illustration of the vulnerability and malleability of the female penitent before a confessor who stands in the place of God. His bifurcated role in both the internal forum of conscience and the external disciplinary forum, the methods common to each forum, and the traffic between the two: all of these factors illuminate the potential hazards that could arise for women as Christendom's love affair with female spirituality grew cold.<sup>96</sup>

In 1298, Pope Boniface VIII issued the directive *Periculoso* requiring the strict cloistering of professed religious women. Afterward, women's religious communities, if they sought canonical approval, would have to incorporate cloister regulations into their rules. The general trend in medieval commentaries saw the cloister as a unique and inherent quality of being a nun, and a protection both for female religious and their male counterparts. Although many monks were cloistered as well, the discipline was usually not considered as central to their vows. Despite the low view of women in this period, the gender biased cloistering of nuns was likely due in large part to their lack of legitimate reasons to leave. In the early epochs of monasticism, monks were just as prone to be cloistered as women, but the demand for the sacramental ministries of priesthood necessarily drew many monks out of the monastery in the High Middle Ages and Renaissance. Thus, the contrast between monks and nuns did sharpen in the two centuries before the Reformation, but not for entirely sexist reasons.<sup>97</sup> Also, Elizabeth Makowski has argued that the implementation of *Periculoso* was often much looser than its language and commentaries might suggest. Significant exceptions of various degrees were granted to many religious women, sometimes with permission directly from the papacy.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> The author is indebted to Sr. Chiara Sondag for her research on the contemporary feminist versus traditionalist views of *Periculoso* and *Circa Pastoralis*.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth A. LeFebvre, "Canon Law and Cloistered Women: *Periculoso* and its Commentators, 1298-1545 by Elizabeth Makowski," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 1134-1136.

## Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (d.1274) formed the standard in Christian philosophy for hundreds of years after his death. Although his teachings are not easily criticized, his indebtedness to Aristotle led him to regress in some of his sexual theory where Hildegard had advanced. Thomas did correct the inconsistencies of Augustine and Abelard, however, by allowing that woman's "imperfect" and inferior nature could reach a state of equality in complementarity with man through grace. This was different and better than the aforementioned theories because it included a kind of growing perfection within the *physical body* as well as the soul, thus avoiding the full contradiction of woman having an inferior body with an equal or superior soul. Metaphysically though, the female body *was* still considered matter to man's form, and potency to man's act. Woman's starting point as the image of God was less than man's, but the two sexes combined made a more perfect image of God than either alone.<sup>99</sup> There is much subtlety in Aquinas' account of the active and passive principles of man and woman. Man is considered the active form and woman the passive matter in regard to procreation, because the flawed biology of the time did not comprehend the equal contribution of gametes. Even so, the woman *provides* the passive element in procreation, as opposed to woman *being* the passive element. Moreover, the form and matter are cooperative. The passive nature of the female contribution is no different from the passive element of every human soul when acted upon by God. Similarly in his epistemology, first principles are received in a passive and feminine way by *every* intellect whether female or male.<sup>100</sup>

For Aquinas, the teleological end of the human person is to know God, through a cooperation of body and soul. If human life was directed to generation alone, then man would be asexual, but as it is, sexual difference indicates a fulfillment that reaches beyond reproduction. In *De Malo*, Aquinas defends monogamous and un-lustful nuptial union on the grounds of what is best for the education of children. Thereby, Aquinas supports both the unitive and procreative dimensions

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<sup>99</sup> "As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence; such as that of a south wind, which is moist, as the Philosopher observes (De Gener. Animal. iv, 2). On the other hand, as regards human nature in general, woman is not misbegotten, but is included in nature's intention as directed to the work of generation. Now the general intention of nature depends on God, Who is the universal Author of nature. Therefore, in producing nature, God formed not only the male but also the female." Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas* I. Q. 92, Art. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>

<sup>100</sup> *A Hermeneutic of Aquinas' Mens*, 115.

of marriage. Man is likened to God the Father in being the principle source of the human race as the Father is the source of the Trinity. Woman is created out of man to set woman apart as man's greatest love within creation. Woman is not only man's helper in procreation but also in the domestic life as his "subject." Yet Aquinas carefully distinguishes between the subjection of slave and the subjection of politics.<sup>101</sup> Domestic/political subjection is better than slavery because one is subjected for one's own well-being and not as a means to anyone else's ends. This ordering of headship is natural and would have existed even before the Fall.

Aquinas placed love at the center of the soul's motivations, as the universal appetite of all the appetites. The *imago Dei* gives the human person both a desire to live forever with God and a desire to know those things about God not yet known. The equality of man and woman in dignity as mutually possessing the *imago Dei* is unquestionable here. Man and woman reflect the Trinity most perfectly by their minds, in which intellect and will represent the procession of Word and Love. It is clear that man and woman (*homo*) mutually participate in the same end of knowing (*intelligere*) despite that many interpreters of Aquinas have taken *homo* to mean mankind as distinctly male.<sup>102</sup> For Aquinas, love is interwoven with knowledge, in other words, where love is greater, understanding is also greater. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, as in other places, Aquinas upholds the fittingness of Mary Magdalene as first to witness Christ's resurrection; since she loved Jesus so much, she is especially worthy of this privilege. Also, in his *Catena Aurea*, Aquinas compares maturation of understanding the Word in the human mind to a kind of gestation, exemplified in the pondering heart of the Virgin Mary.<sup>103</sup> He also concedes that women can be political leaders, even though they cannot be priests, and they may even be more disposed to prophecy than men.<sup>104</sup>

Aquinas explains the human mind (*mens*) using the terms *intellectus* and *ratio*. *Intellectus* first apprehends being or existence. The intellectual memory is a passive element in the *intellectus*. "The act of *intellectus* is the immediate and simple grasping of the truth. The act of *ratio* is the process of

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<sup>101</sup> "I answer that, It was right for the woman to be made from a rib of man. First, to signify the social union of man and woman, for the woman should neither "use authority over man," and so she was not made from his head; nor was it right for her to be subject to man's contempt as his slave, and so she was not made from his feet. Secondly, for the sacramental signification; for from the side of Christ sleeping on the Cross the Sacraments flowed--namely, blood and water--on which the Church was established." ST. I Q. 92. Art. 3.

<sup>102</sup> ST. I Q. 92-93.

<sup>103</sup> *A Hermeneutic of Aquinas' Mens*, 117.

<sup>104</sup> "Prophecy is not a sacrament but a gift of God. Wherefore there it is not the signification, but only the thing which is necessary. And since in matters pertaining to the soul woman does not differ from man as to the thing (for sometimes a woman is found to be better than many men as regards the soul), it follows that she can receive the gift of prophecy and the like, but not the sacrament of Orders." ST. *Supplementum Tertiæ Partis* Q. 39. Art. 1.

moving from one known thing to another known thing so as to arrive at truth which is intelligible and understandable.”<sup>105</sup> The way in which man and woman differ in *mens* is related to the distinction of the sensitive powers of the male and in the female bodies. The body does not participate in the intellectual act per se, but the body is necessary for actualizing the potential of the *intellectus*. *Intellectus* receives the phantasms of material objects as well as first principles, and *ratio* works from this simpler data to the knowledge of higher things. The *intellectus* corresponds to a passive contemplative aspect in human life, an active resting in communion with divine *Intellectus*. *Ratio*, likewise, receives its principles from memory but actively orders those principles to discovering new, more comprehensive truths. Thus, both capacities retain passive and active elements, *ratio* and *intellectus* operate within each other, although each exercises its own power more characteristically.<sup>106</sup> Pia Francesca de Solenni thinks this explication of the complementarity of the *intellectus* and *ratio* powers within the *mens* could be anachronistically extended into Aquinas’ anthropology of man and woman (now that embryology has corrected the material mistake of Aristotle). The *ratio* as masculine and the *intellectus* as feminine allows for a “sexually differentiated epistemology” within the one *imago dei*.

## Catherine of Sienna and the Brides of Satan

Around the fourteenth century, espousal to Christ took on a frightening twist of carnality. The idea of demons having sex with women, going back to Tertullian, the Book of Enoch, and Genesis 6, reemerged with inflated social capital. “As the example of Catherine of Siena (d.1380) suggests, moreover, the mystical marriage was destined to become more of an actual event that becomes progressively more elaborate and literal.”<sup>107</sup> Catherine received visions of Christ who promised to espouse her in faith. Accompanied by a heavenly party, Jesus eventually appeared to Catherine and ceremonially bound her to Himself with an invisible ring and a ministerial commission. Catherine is well-known for her shockingly visceral spirituality. Though not especially sexual, Catherine’s life represents the orthodox example of a *Sponsa Christi* in her era. However, in wider culture, supernatural lovers were taking on increasingly demonic characteristics. In records of clerical discourse from the period, the incubus, a male sexual demon, began attracting a large degree of attention. The issue of demonic sexual acts loomed large enough that Lateran IV felt the need to

<sup>105</sup> ST. I Q. 79. Art. 8.

<sup>106</sup> *A Hermeneutic of Aquinas’ Mens*, 139-40.

<sup>107</sup> *Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 215.

restate the non-materiality of angels and demons. But these efforts were unsuccessful in extracting the superstition. “Thomas [Aquinas] overcame what had to be the most daunting demonic physical handicap of all, immateriality, by devising a way in which the incubi could still debauch and impregnate by garnering sperm from a man as a succubus, which was subsequently injected into a woman by an incubus.”<sup>108</sup> The incubus displaced an earlier, and ancient, interest in the succubus (seductive female demon) because of the rising superstition that women were conspicuously susceptible to these hellion attacks. Because of this seeming danger of sexual perversion, the mystical marriage came under sharp scrutiny from the Church and fell out of fashion in conservative circles. “Indeed, in the fourteenth century, a *quaestio* began making the rounds in academic circles that addressed the problem of whether a woman worshipping Satan in the appearance of Christ sinned mortally.”<sup>109</sup> The Councils of Constance (1414) and Basel (1431) also addressed these issues with particular focus on the weakness and vulnerability of women. An increase in legal cases of witchcraft naturally succeeded this stigmatization of female bridal mysticism.

From 1450 to 1750, tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, were executed for witchcraft. Between two-thirds and four-fifths of all the accused witches were women, but in certain areas at certain times more than eighty percent of the accused were female.<sup>110</sup> During the early medieval period, natural magic, sorcery, and alchemy were addressed by the Church with relative leniency because of the nebulous boundaries between science and superstition. Historians debate the cultural and political tensions which may have brought about the shift, but at some point in the fifteenth century, there was a surge of fear about personal alliances with demonic powers. Although the Christian Inquisition was far less involved in the witch-trials than has been assumed in popular discourse (the large majority of these European trials were held by secular courts), the Dominican Inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger’s manual, *Malleus Maleficarum* (“Hammer Against Witches”), *did* have widespread influence for hundreds of years after its publication in 1486.

“The authors argue that women are particularly susceptible to witchcraft because they are light-minded, fickle, feeble in intelligence, quick to waiver in faith, and cursed with sexual desires so insatiable that they lust for intercourse with the devil; they are ‘by nature’ prone to such evils because Eve was originally constructed from a ‘bent rib.’ Men are instructed to praise God for preserving them from this terrible

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 239. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia* Q. 6, Art. 8, resp. ad obj. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>110</sup> *Women and Religion*, 119.

curse; the authors claim that god's incarnation as a member of the male sex gives men relative immunity to such evil."<sup>111</sup>

## Into the Feminist Milieu

### Renaissance Humanism

During the Renaissance, the historical conversation on sexuality began to isolate itself to specific school faculties. The Faculty of Arts (where philosophy was taught) adopted the practice of using gender-neutral language in reference to the human person, while the blooming Faculty of Medicine took over research on sexually differentiated human generation. Also in this period female authors made their first pronounced appearance in history, especially in religious and humanist communities of discourse.<sup>112</sup> Another shift of the Renaissance period came from the very conscious abstraction of "masculine" and "feminine" ideas from male and female bodies. Consequently, a heightened appreciation for the self-determining aspect of identity formation arose, that is, Christian self-formation with God, not to be confused with total personal autonomy as advertised in the Enlightenment.<sup>113</sup> In this atmosphere, the theory of recapitulation – Christ as the new Adam and Mary as the Eve – came to maturity. In contrast to the fear of Eve's weakness, as represented by the "Hammer Against the Witches," "recapitulation not only enables Mary to gather in the entire history of women and to offer a new beginning, it also takes the nature of woman *per se* and elevates it to a new dimension of reality."<sup>114</sup> Prudence Allen summarizes the development of the concept of woman from 1250-1500 as follows. In metaphysics, masculine and feminine qualities came to be attributed to both men and women and determined primarily by relations. In natural science, biological generation was compared with spiritual fecundity and with God's birth in the world. Epistemologically, women were allowed to participate in academia and engage with men in public debate. And finally, in terms of ethics, women were acknowledged for services in the public sphere and gained access to juridical redress and property rights similar to the rights of men.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>112</sup> *The Concept of Woman: Volume II: Part 2*, 1065.

<sup>113</sup> *The Concept of Woman: Volume II: Part 1*, 19-21.

<sup>114</sup> *The Concept of Woman: Volume II: Part 2*, 1067.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 1085.

## Protestantism, Romanticism, and Puritanism

The Protestant Reformation did little to procure women's "liberation." Martin Luther (d.1546) believed that women and men were completely equal before the fall, but he also held that woman became subject to man because of Original Sin. "Hence it follows that if the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects. For the punishment, that she is now subjected to the man, was imposed on her after sin because of sin... Therefore Eve was not like the woman of today; her state was far better and more excellent, and she was in no respect inferior to Adam, whether you count the qualities of the body of those of the mind."<sup>116</sup> In fact, without Original Sin it is hard to see how Luther would have maintained any metaphysical or ethical differences between the sexes at all. Later, the Protestant Reformation would siphon Catholic's from religious orders, removing many females from the opportunity for education and self-governance. On the other hand, the Protestant opinion of marriage was slightly elevated as a result. As a positive consequence for Catholicism, the Counter-Reformation involved a renewal in women's religious vocations that eventually (though not fully realized until after the French Revolution) led to female orders working "in the world," that is, outside of the cloister. Teresa of Avila (d.1582), Angela Merici (d.1540), Marie of the Incarnation (d.1618), and later, Elizabeth Ann Seton (d.1821) and Katherine Drexel (d.1955) are exemplars of such women. In the Eighteen and Nineteenth Centuries, female religious would establish themselves as the main, and often only, providers of children's education and medical care in the West.

A hundred years after Luther, John Milton (d.1674) had a noteworthy role in developing the concept of companionship and mutual help (the unitive aspect) in marriage. Milton defended divorce on the grounds that a non-spiritually-unitive marriage was *more sinful* than the practice of divorce. Marriage's primary purpose was not procreation, but the Godly society between husband and wife. For Milton, the "one-flesh" of Genesis referred to spiritual compatibility more than to physical union. This insight would be a sign of the Romantic era, in its characteristic humanism and appreciation for the natural world, including sexual difference. The amplification of the values of emotional beauty and relational unity naturally favored female spirituality. However, these female values, considered as equal or better than male values, were still inconsistently built on top of a misogynistic anthropology.

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<sup>116</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* 2:18, trans. Elizabeth A. Clark, in *Women and Religion*, 163-64.

Another important romantic, “Schleiermacher [d.1768] delineates several significant ideas: that every person is an embodiment of genderless infinite humanity; that gender is a ‘limitation’ that ‘cloaks’ our infinite humanity; that thinking of oneself as a gendered being makes all one’s experiences a ‘miseducation’; that the purpose of life is, through ‘the power of will and education,’ to draw ‘close to the infinite again’; and that ‘future improvement’ in one’s life is effected through contact with art, learning, love of country, and especially through friendship between men and women.”<sup>117</sup> Schleiermacher wanted men to rediscover their intuitive and emotional lives through friendship with women. Understanding of the opposite sex would bring one back into communion with infinite humanity and God. He also thought that the connection to the infinite divine involved both the overcoming of gender and a return to childlikeness. Like later psychologist of religion William James, Schleiermacher saw two types of human development, those who were “once-born” and those who were “twice-born.” The once-born were those who retained their childlike identity into adulthood without the need to rebel against their roots. The twice-born conversely, came to adulthood through an existential crisis of some kind. In Schleiermacher’s view, women stand closer to the “once-born” type than do men, thus men must struggle harder to regain the virtues of childhood and become whole.<sup>118</sup>

Various Christian views on women arose within the European and American contexts. The Shaker’s believed that Christ was reincarnated through a woman, Ann Lee, and that sexual intercourse was the main obstacle to salvation. The Mormons supported the practice of polygamy, although it found no acceptance in early American culture – even Joseph Smith’s wife, Emma, was a staunch opponent of polygamy and declared that the teaching came “straight from hell.”<sup>119</sup> The 1920’s women’s movement, or “first wave feminism,” grew out of the anti-slavery movement. For some reason, women were generally more moved by the cause of injustice against African-American people than men. The Grimke sisters, Angelina and Sarah, in their fight for abolition were forced to confront a sexist culture recalcitrant to public female exhortations. The Grimke sisters were concerned not only with freeing the slaves, but also with the equal treatment of black people.

Unlike the relative Biblical faithfulness of the Grimke sisters, other feminists surfaced in this period. Elizabeth Cady Stanton – the central thinker of the twentieth century women’s movement –

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<sup>117</sup> *Women and Religion*, 186-87.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.



had little respect for the doctrinal “limitations” put upon the “Supreme Intelligence.” Stanton thought institutionalized religion much to blame for emphasizing the inferiority and subjection of women. The goal of her “The Woman’s Bible” was to release women from the bondage of internalizing the sexist scriptures of Jews and Christians. Jarena Lee, on the other hand, an African-American Christian woman, felt called by God to preach the Gospel from a pulpit. The bishop of her African Methodist Episcopal Church eventually approved her mission and she stirred the hearts of thousands of early Americans who heard her, including many bi-racial congregations.<sup>120</sup> As regarded the all-male priesthood, the emergence of female pastors within Protestant denominations did not initially confound the Catholic Church, since no one, on either side, believed that Protestant ministers were in the tradition of sacramental priesthood. Only when Anglican Churches, who were considered to uphold most of the orthodox tradition, began to “ordain” women in the 1970s, did the question of hierarchal sexism become relevant to Catholic culture. Prominent theologians, such as Hans Kung, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeeckx, came forward in support of Haye van der Meer’s thesis that the exclusion of women from the Catholic priesthood was a socio-cultural teaching and not a doctrinal matter.<sup>121</sup> Pope Paul VI explicitly rejected this conclusion through the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s declaration *Inter insigniores* (1976): “On the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood.” The document gives four reasons why women cannot be ordained priests: 1) unbroken and universal tradition, 2) Christ’s act of appointing twelve male apostles, 3) the apostles’ continuation of ordaining male leaders, and 4) the practice being historically normative for the Church.<sup>122</sup> “It is true that in the writings of the Fathers, one will find the undeniable influence of prejudices unfavourable to woman, but nevertheless, it should be noted that these prejudices had hardly any influences on their pastoral activity, and still less on their spiritual direction.”<sup>123</sup> The document defends and promotes public roles for women in the Church, in the example of the New Testament prophetesses and female catechists, but nevertheless reserves the basis for an exclusively male priesthood on the sacramental sign of Christ’s historical maleness.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 258-59.

<sup>121</sup> Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: a Guide to the Teaching of the Church*, (Chicago, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2006), 10-11.

<sup>122</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter insigniores* (1976).  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19761015\\_inter-insigniores\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html)

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

## The Catholic Church and Women through the Twenty-first Century

Although there are other important moments of exception in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, the basic premise of women's bodily inferiority (which usually included intellectual inferiority) was not seriously contradicted by the Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council. The 1920s witnessed the rise of women's suffrage and the movement of women into the workforce, including many Protestant pulpits. This is called "first wave feminism." The 1960s and 1970s – the period referred to as "second wave feminism" – marked the long overdue liberation of the female body from an Aristotelian anthropology, which considered woman to be a "deformed" or "misbegotten" man in the realm of natural science. The ovum was discovered in 1792, and subsequent theories of the "active" male sperm overpowering the "passive" female egg were proven to be gross biological errors in the ensuing century. Nevertheless, not until the mid-1900s were women's bodies finally being studied from the medical perspective of female doctors, that is, the biochemical and experiential differences of the female physiology were no longer being forced into comparison with male bodies.<sup>125</sup>

Opening its eyes and ears to the concerns of the age, the Catholic Church during and after the Second Vatican Council made important and authoritative statements regarding women. Pope John XXIII (d.1963), in *Pacem in Terris*, had demanded equal rights and respect for women in private and public life.<sup>126</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* would say even more. Women and men as individuals were to be held definitively equal in the image of God, "the only creature on earth willed by God for its own sake."<sup>127</sup> Thus, women could never again be described as means' to the ends' of men. Sexism was to be acknowledged as among the most dire forms of modern injustice, against God's plan, to be overcome and eliminated. The reality of equality in natural human rights, as well as in dignity through Baptism, does not and should not imply a sexually indistinguishable theological anthropology. "Although the Blessed Virgin Mary surpassed in dignity and in excellence all the

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<sup>125</sup> Susan A Ross, *Anthropology: seeking light and beauty* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 90-91.

<sup>126</sup> Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (1963), 41.

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html)

<sup>127</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), 24.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)

Apostles, nevertheless it was not to her but to them that the Lord entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>128</sup>

For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right to choose a husband freely, to embrace a state of life or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men. Therefore, although rightful differences exist between men, the equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.<sup>129</sup>

Pope John Paul II (d.2005) bequeathed to the Church the most comprehensive and consistent teaching on the theology of sexuality and masculine-feminine complementarity in the history of Christianity. Following the assertions of Vatican II, John Paul II combined the unitive and procreative ends of marriage into an indissoluble whole. He upheld the equal dignity of men and women inside and outside of the home, and he acknowledged that male and female roles in the family can sometimes be interchangeable.<sup>130</sup> He also did much to raise awareness of the discrimination against women that still exists in many non-Western cultures of the world. Although sensitive to the changing roles of women and defensive of their inherent right to the public domain, the Pope maintained the superiority of a maternal identity for women in the family. He repeatedly admonished any economic state of affairs that coerced women into the workforce. In his 1988 apostolic letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the pope elaborated on his complementary view of sexuality, attaching the vocation of every woman to the example of Mary the mother of Christ.<sup>131</sup> Every woman was “ontologically” related to the feminine and thereby determined, in a limited sense, to be oriented toward receptivity of the self-gift of human persons:

While the dignity of woman witnesses to the love which she receives in order to love in return, the biblical “exemplar” of the Woman also seems to reveal *the true order of love which constitutes woman's own vocation*. Vocation is meant here in its fundamental, and one may say universal significance, a significance which is then actualized and expressed in women's many different “vocations” in the Church and the world. The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that *God entrusts the human being to her in a special way*. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human

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<sup>128</sup> *Inter insigniores*, 2.

<sup>129</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 29.

<sup>130</sup> Lisa Cahill, “Commentary on *Familiaris Consortio*,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 373.

<sup>131</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), 5.

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_15081988\\_mulieris-dignitatem\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html)

being. But this entrusting concerns women in a special way - precisely by reason of their femininity - and this in a particular way determines their vocation.<sup>132</sup>

Feminine particularity never excluded the equality of the sexes in interpersonal communion.<sup>133</sup> The 1983 Code of Canon law, which John Paul II commissioned, assured this: “From their rebirth in Christ, there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality regarding dignity and action by which they all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ according to each one’s own condition and function.”<sup>134</sup> This officially altered the 1917 Code of Canon Law in four relevant ways by 1) eliminating a hierarchy in male and female natures, 2) discarding the negative association between femininity and temptation, 3) abandoning the teaching of inferior female intellect and judgment, and 4) dispensing the need to cater to female “timidity and scrupulosity.”<sup>135</sup> Markedly, Pope John Paul II never officially endorsed the headship of men in the family or society, although some say it is implicit in the association of masculinity to maleness and an all male priesthood. The previous canons propagating hierarchy of natures and intellects (in favor of men) could be *partially* excused by the persistence of faulty embryology and a confusing history of Church anthropology, and also by the fact that women had much less access to education than men for the first 1500 years of the Church especially. In the 1983 Code, the only distinction remaining between the “rights” of men and women to participate in Church and society was that of the ordained and non-ordained. Whether the positions of lector and altar-server should still give priority to men is debated. John Paul II’s 1995 “Letter to Women” went further than the Church had ever gone before in praising the work of women in “social, economic, cultural, artistic, and political” development.<sup>136</sup> The Holy Father even applauded “the great process of women’s liberation” and apologized for the ubiquitous oppression of women throughout history.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, the controversial paradox of asymmetrical sexual equality shifted its emphasis strongly in favor of the equalitarian dimension, and this is now the most authoritative foundation for the Catholic Church’s theological anthropology. The *Theology of the Body*,” published in 1986, reinterpreted the traditional understanding of “headship” and “submission” in relation to man and woman respectively. First and foremost, the quintessential male-female relationship between Adam

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>134</sup> Code of Canon Law, 208, (1983). [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_PU.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_PU.HTM)

<sup>135</sup> *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 30-31.

<sup>136</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women” (1995), Number 3.

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii LET\\_29061995\\_women\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_29061995_women_en.html)

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., Number 7.

and Eve was characterized by equality, mutuality, and reciprocity. Commenting on Ephesians 5:21-33, John Paul II appropriated to Christian marriage the responsibility of mediating between Christ and the world – a duty that essentially overshadows the concerns of gender equality and difference. Marriage, the foundation of community, should be an image of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ gives himself, and the Church receives him, both in a “spousal way.” The right balance of marriage is struck in “reciprocal subjection” of both spouses to each other in the fear of Christ/God. The husband loves the wife as if his own body and the wife receives his love as from her own head, just as Christ builds up the Church in “bodily” strength and beauty and the Church feeds on the “headship” of his Word and Sacrament. The analogy of spousal love became decisive here, since it alone could offer that unique insight into the mystery of grace, namely, that God *gives all of himself* to man (or as much as man is capable of receiving). This grace in turn lights the way for a true understanding of both marriage and celibacy. Marriage can be called the “primordial sacrament” because it is at the very center of the sacrament of creation, and is the means by which God chose to pass down the original and “eternal election” of Adam and Eve to become children of God through Christ. Thus, “the sacrament of redemption clothes itself in the figure and form of the primordial sacrament” of marriage. The fruitfulness of Christ’s union with the Church is visceral and indissoluble just as the fruitfulness of marriage is, but in neither case can the mystery be completely exhausted. In the New Covenant with historical man, marriage becomes part of “the ethos of the redemption of the body.” Marriage as “life according to the Spirit” is the kind of love that is due to the divine dignity of human persons. The pure-reciprocal-gift of masculinity and femininity inherently opens itself to new-life, physical or spiritual. This spousal love is a sign of eschatological hope, bringing into the world, through its generative nature, the very inhabitants of Heaven.<sup>138</sup> By this teaching, Pope John Paul II reoriented the feminist conversation to its ultimate objective.

The *Theology of the Body*, as the crucial moment in the development of the doctrine of male and female complementarity, has not been entirely well-received, even within Catholicism. Between 1966 and 1990, one hundred and thirty thousand women abandoned their religious communities to become Catholic activists or process theologians, to join the “New Age” or “liberation” movements.<sup>139</sup> In the same period, sociological and historical studies of women have become two of the most common college and graduate-level disciplinary foci. Since Vatican II, three general types

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<sup>138</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, ed. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 465-616.

<sup>139</sup> Donna Steichen, *Ungodly Rage: the Hidden Face of Catholic Feminism* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991).

of feminists have been in debate with the Catholic Church: liberal feminists, Protestant feminists, and Catholic feminists. Liberal feminists tend to argue against Church teaching on sexual differentiation, especially the exclusion of females from the priesthood, as a perpetuation of unjust political sexism and a violation of women's human rights. But from the Catholic Church's perspective male ordination is not like advancement in any other career; it is not an office conferred on the basis of human merit. Moreover, the "hierarchal priesthood" is at the service of the "hierarchy of holiness."<sup>140</sup> Leadership, in the political sense, is not the primary purpose of priesthood, nor is public leadership in the Church restricted to men. No leader in Church history was more sympathetic to the changing paradigms in female public relations than John Paul II. "During Pope John Paul's pontificate, women took over pastoral and administrative duties in priestless parishes, they were appointed chancellors of dioceses around the world, and they began swelling the ranks of 'experts' at Vatican synods and symposiums. In 2004, for the first time, the pope appointed two women theologians to the prestigious International Theological Commission and named a Harvard University law professor, Mary Ann Glendon, to be president of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences."<sup>141</sup>

Catholic feminism, for obvious reasons, provides the most compelling forum for discussions about Christian anthropology and sexual moral teaching in the twenty-first century, its strengths and its weaknesses. Three strains of feminism coexist within the contemporary Catholic Church. "Papal feminists" would generally embrace the model of sexuality proposed by John Paul II in the *Theology of the Body* and elsewhere. "Progressive feminists" within the Catholic Church would like to see a more nuanced theology of sexuality, open to many (not only two) genders, and supportive of the possibility of the "unitive aspect" of nuptial communion outside of procreative situations.<sup>142</sup> The third category of Catholic feminists might be labeled "pluralist feminists" because they are open dissenters against "limiting" Revelation to Catholic doctrine and Catholic language. These thinkers occupy a vast spectrum of beliefs, more or less antagonistic to the Catholic Church. The following excerpt from a twentieth century pluralist feminist illustrates the wide range of opinions among those who consider themselves Catholic Christian in the "spirit of Vatican II:"

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<sup>140</sup> *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 5; 27.

<sup>141</sup> Cindy Wooden, "Pope John Paul II looked closely at the role of women in the Church," *Catholic News Service* (2005): <http://www.catholicnews.com/jpii/stories/story12.htm>

<sup>142</sup> *Anthropology*, 102-07.

Adam and Eve's sin... was, first, a sexual transgression: they knew they were naked. In the ancient world, images of the snake were always associated with the goddess of fertility, the goddess of life. Thus the snake is a symbol of pre-eminent female power and also of the threat of chaos: female power out of control. The banishing of the snake is the banishing of the goddess and, symbolically, of Eve's free and autonomous expression of her sexuality... 'You shall be gods' is a transgression of power. Because of her autonomous act, her curiosity and her aggressive desire to *know*, she is to be punished by being excluded from knowledge and from the experience that is power. It's not just the triumph of the 'One True God' over the fertility goddess and the cults. It is a clear condemnation by Yahweh of female sexuality exercised freely and autonomously. It is above all a condemnation and prohibition of the exercise of female power and authority... Faith, [Kolbensschlag] said, "is the process of continually replacing our metaphors for God." 'It is women above all who are in the process of reversing Genesis, turning the myth on its head by validating and freeing their sexuality, by theologizing out of their own experience and taking responsibility for symbol making in the public sector... Why should we be surprised that the Holy One is breaking through the consciousness of humanity as the Goddess or as an uppity woman?'<sup>143</sup>

All three of these groups of Catholic feminists will acknowledge that, prior to Vatican II, the Church's rationalizations for the exclusively male priesthood and for sexual hierarchy in political life were founded on, and helped proliferate, a sexist theological anthropology and misogynistic social teaching.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, these problematic teachings grew up alongside a stream of pious writings and charitable practices that could be assembled in defense of the tradition of sexual equality, which was alive from the beginning of Christianity. After Vatican II and the influence of Pope John Paul II, it can no longer be said that women are *in any way inferior* (or superior) to men. The unilateral subjugation of women to men has now lost all doctrinal and canonical backing. The theological anthropology of the Church is at a point of critical development for this reason. The differences that have been affirmed between the sexes can no longer be isolated from the context of universal equality in nature and in Baptism. Any subjection that occurs between the sexes can only be justified on the grounds of a burden freely undertaken for the sake of community, and can never be justifiably coerced by law. Even within the covenantal bonds of marriage or religious vows, the "gender normative roles" of men and women are led by the dynamism of charity and, therefore, are potentially interchangeable in most ways.

The "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World" (2004) summarizes well the state of the question for Catholic teaching on women today. The book of Genesis demonstrates that "the revealed truth concerning the human person as 'the image and likeness' of God constitutes the immutable *basis of*

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<sup>143</sup> *Ungodly Rage*, 149-50.

<sup>144</sup> *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 46-47.

*all Christian anthropology.*<sup>145</sup> Man and woman are in God's image both as individuals and as a collective humanity; they are integrally and fractionally complementary in the same instant.<sup>146</sup> The sexual differences articulated in Genesis are oriented toward communion; their purpose and meaning is entirely as gifts of love, to be freely bestowed and freely accepted. The chronological hierarchy of man and woman's creation does not imply metaphysical hierarchy of any kind, but expresses the integration of the masculine and feminine in so far as they are embodied in man and woman respectively. Specifically, woman's creation from the side of man is a sign of a particularly female attentiveness to other human persons.<sup>147</sup> Man's creation in "original solitude" is a sign of the particularly male awareness of subjective isolation and abstraction. In this way, man as masculine and woman as feminine complement each other: man's orientation to his own selfhood is better realized with the addition of woman's orientation to his otherness and vice versa. Woman helps man become aware of his communal calling, and man brings woman into a heightened sense of her personal dignity. But sin corrupted the congeniality of this relationship between man and woman. "Their equal dignity as persons is realized as physical, psychological and ontological complementarity, giving rise to a harmonious relationship of 'uni-duality', which only sin and 'the structures of sin' inscribed in culture render potentially conflictual. The biblical vision of the human person suggests that problems related to sexual difference, whether on the public or private level, should be addressed by a relational approach and not by competition or retaliation."<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, the Christian life of Love *requires* sexual differentiation; it is a theological certitude, a characteristic of human beatitude. In Baptism, the spousal meaning of the human body as male or female is taken up into a new level of reality, that is "the sacrament of love between Christ and the Church."<sup>149</sup> Celibacy therefore was instituted as a sign of the way sexual complementarity will continue in Heaven.<sup>150</sup>

The intuition that woman has a special capacity for empathy is supported by her physical and psychological disposition toward life-giving and life-nurturing. "Whether lived out or remaining potential, this capacity is a reality that structures the female personality in a profound way. It allows

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<sup>145</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church On The Collaboration Of Men And Women In The Church And In The World" (2004), 5.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040731\\_collaboration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html)

<sup>146</sup> Using the language of Prudence Allen.

<sup>147</sup> "Collaboration of Men and Women," 6.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



her to acquire maturity very quickly, and gives a sense of the seriousness of life and of its responsibilities. A sense and a respect for what is concrete develop in her, opposed to abstractions which are so often fatal for the existence of individuals and society. It is women, in the end, who even in very desperate situations, as attested by history past and present, possess a singular capacity to persevere in adversity, to keep life going even in extreme situations, to hold tenaciously to the future, and finally to remember with tears the value of every human life.”<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, women’s potential for physical motherhood through procreation is not to be treated as a prison of social or biological destiny. The Catholic Church’s long tradition of exalting female virginity and religious life illustrates the broad horizons of the reality of *spiritual* motherhood, as against the social confinement of women and femininity to the nuclear family. Women’s inherent empathic relationality, far surpassing biological fecundity, is the true “genius of women.” This genius is *needed* in all realms of society. This does not mean, however, that men and women should occupy each and every occupation in numerical equality. “John Paul II has written, ‘it will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother – without inhibiting her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination and without penalizing her as compared with other women – to devote herself to taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs, which vary with age’.”<sup>152</sup> Feminine values are, on another level, universal human values. Every human person has a capacity and call to live for the other. Femininity in this sense transcends the female sex. Yet, women are more immediately attuned to these values and have *the privilege of being their sign in the world*.<sup>153</sup> Feminism, in this true sense, represents the re-humanization of the earth, because “modernity has entailed an imbalance of masculine representations.”<sup>154</sup> On the highest plane, the Catholic Church embodies the archetypal “bride” in relation, submission, and receptivity to God the Father, *Logos*, and Spirit. She is the mother and the body of Christ, the consubstantial human nature of Mary and Jesus, married to Divinity and thus the gateway to Heaven.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>154</sup> Eugen Schoenfeld and Stjepan G. Mestrovic, “With justice and mercy: instrumental-masculine and expressive-feminine elements in religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (December 1991): 378.

# An Analysis of Development in the Theology of Woman

## John Henry Newman's Seven Notes

John Henry Newman devised seven “notes” to test the validity of developments in Christian doctrine.<sup>155</sup> Changes in the Catholic Church’s theology of woman can be analyzed according to Newman’s theory in order to judge the legitimacy or heresy of said changes as well as the potential projections for future development. The Christian faith hinges upon belief that God has had the power and prerogative to reveal Himself in human history. Although the theology of revelation has itself developed, the basic assertion of the Christian religion is that Jesus of Nazareth was the mediator and fullness of the one God and Father.<sup>156</sup> The question of *how* Christ mediates divinity to the present generation has elicited countless historical and theological debates from the death of Christ forward. The Catholic position maintains that the interior prompting of the God the Holy Spirit has moved in conjunction with the exterior expressions of Scripture and Tradition, which have been and will be faithfully and authentically interpreted by the Church’s magisterium.<sup>157</sup> Because the magisterium’s articulations of doctrine do not possess the same level of authority as the words and deeds of Scripture and Tradition, it is necessary to consistently reassess the content of the “deposit” according to the methods and means of new discoveries and established technologies. Newman’s theory of development provides a method for evaluating the continuity of doctrinal pronouncements across time and culture, in essence, to test and decide what is genuinely Christian.

Newman’s first note is “identity of type.” Just as if looking at a human body over time, observing an idea in its age and in its youth, one will see the preservation of forms and manners that exhibit the same essential identity. Yet, this analogy also allows for serious variation of “proportion and relation” in the aspects of the original type or idea.<sup>158</sup> In fact, obstinacy against growth would be a sign of corruption in development. Newman references consistent worldly hatred for the Catholic Church, providing a variety of alternating reasons, as an example of this preservation in Christian

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<sup>155</sup> John Henry Newman, *An essay on the development of Christian doctrine* (London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1920). Cf. John Henry Newman, “Sermon XV,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1900).

<sup>156</sup> Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (1965), 2.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-10.

<sup>158</sup> *Essay on Development*, 173.

identity.<sup>159</sup> The second note is similar to the first: “continuity of principles.” “Doctrines stand to principles, as the definitions to the axioms and postulates of mathematics.”<sup>160</sup> Principles do not actually develop but are exemplified by corresponding doctrines in their multitudinous applications. Sometimes the abstract principles themselves are not drawn out until late in the history of their concrete utilization. The destruction or abandonment of axiomatic principles is the corruption of a doctrine. For example, Anselm’s definition of God as ‘that than which nothing greater can be thought’ remains the principle behind every major religion’s concept of deity, though it surely existed in the minds of men and women long before this twelfth century saying. In the same vein of thought, Newman names “logical sequence” as his fourth note. This logic is not reducible to syllogistic reasoning, nor is it the apologetic rationalization of developments, but it is that *moral reasoning which progresses without intentional effort*, as in the historical maturation of second confession.<sup>161</sup>

To illustrate relevance to the theology of woman, one can look at the case of Catholic priesthood. The essential document defending the male priesthood, *Inter insigniores*, makes no appeal to the socio-cultural convention of women’s subordination to men in its “fundamental reasons” for this doctrine.<sup>162</sup> The “fundamental reasons” form the *type* of the doctrine, and they do not rely on its peripheral aspects as seen from shifting perspectives through two millennia. The common citation of Paul’s proscriptions for subjection, by the Father’s and scholastics alike, as well as Christ’s evident human maleness are considered “theological reasons” of “fittingness;” they are invoked only to support the “fundamental reasons,” not to provide the doctrinal premises. Thus, the *principles* of the doctrine are unaltered. Rather, the Church built its foundation on conformity to the plan laid out by God Himself, as evidenced in Christ’s own active choice of twelve male apostles and the Church’s unbroken tradition of apostolic imitation. To suggest that Christ chose male apostles for primarily or solely socio-cultural reasons would be impossible to prove, not to mention undermining of the whole enterprise of Biblical theology. Christ certainly did not fear to challenge more serious Jewish

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<sup>159</sup> “[If there is] a religion which men hate as proselytizing, anti-social, revolutionary, as dividing families, separating chief friends, corrupting the maxims of government, making a mock at law, dissolving the empire, the enemy of human nature, and a ‘conspirator against its rights and privileges;’—a religion which they associate with intrigue and conspiracy, which they speak about in whispers, which they detect by anticipation in whatever goes wrong, and to which they impute whatever is unaccountable;—a religion, the very name of which they cast out as evil, and use simply as a bad epithet, and which from the impulse of self-preservation they would persecute if they could;—if there be such a religion now in the world, it is not unlike Christianity as that same world viewed it, when first it came forth from its Divine Author.” *Essay on Development*, 247.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>162</sup> *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 47; 77.

conventions (i.e. ‘drink my blood and eat my flesh’). The hermeneutic of faith, which is the moral logic of Newman’s fourth note, was exercised by the Apostles and elders of the Church to discern the requirement of maleness in apostolic succession. In this light, the necessity of maleness for ordination asserted a positive character of material difference, not an inferiority or privation in the nature of woman. Of course, many still struggle to see how difference does not imply hierarchy, and in some sense it must. However, the hierarchy here proposed is not male nature over female nature, but God’s choice over human choice. Christ’s decisions are protected in the type, principles, and logic of male priesthood. The *facts* of revelation, the sphere of dogmatic theology, take precedence over nuptial analogy, which is in the sphere of systematic theology. In the theology of woman, as regards sacramental priesthood, the theological reasons associated with gender roles have developed, while the dogmatic reasons for the doctrine have persevered in identity of type and continuity of principles.

Continuing, Newman’s *third* note, “assimilative power,” contrasts the three above. The strength of a living idea, such as the revelation of God need be, lies in its ability to mingle with excess, in order to incorporate whatever goodness and truth are found there. As a healthy man learns his limitations by pushing past equilibrium, so the waking Christ wrestles his identity from the grip of every opponent heresy. Hence, faithful developments will spontaneously absorb their surrounding genius. The paradox of Incarnation extends to the unity of complexity with simplicity in knowledge. “A mere formula either does not expand or is shattered in expanding. A living idea becomes many, yet remains one.”<sup>163</sup> In conjunction with this test, the fifth note of a genuine development, “anticipation of its future,” supposes that an authentic development will have the quality of being predictable through hindsight. In other words, the earlier Church’s practices will in many ways foreshadow its later canons and rituals. For instance, the ascetic lifestyle of early Christians and Fathers anticipated the future developments of monastic community and the vows of virginity.<sup>164</sup> Assimilation and anticipation in doctrine is tempered by “conservative action upon its past,” the sixth note. “A true development, then, may be described as one which is conservative of the course of antecedent developments being really those antecedents and something besides them: it is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds; and this is its characteristic as contrasted with a corruption.”<sup>165</sup> Newman here

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<sup>163</sup> *Essay on Development*, 186.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-98; 407-10.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

cites the original theologian of development Vincent of Lerin: *perfectus fidei non permutatio*, a perfection of faith and not a mutation.

The sixth note is related to the fourth and fifth because it is through the engagement of heresy and the exploration of inventions that the magisterium comes to recognize what must be preserved from past development, what can be converted and assimilated, as well as how these changes were foreseen by that same past. The history of devotion to the Virgin Mary aptly illustrates such a balance of anticipation and conservation. With old pagans and new Gnostics alike, Mary has opened ecumenical ground, not unrelated to this study, by providing a place for the *total* divinization of woman in the historical Incarnation. So that to whomever might say that God has favored the male sex by becoming a man, it might be answered that Christ first chooses the seat of least honor (cf. Lk 14:10) and that it is no merit of man to be perfected by a divine Person, while it is the total perfection of *female* personhood that makes the Immaculata so special and unique. Nevertheless, this distinction, which necessitates the veneration of Mary as categorically superior to all created beings, is the same distinction which recalls her subordination to the Holy Trinity, that is, precisely due to her creatureliness and female personhood is she a fitting mediatrix between divine nature and man's nature. So, finally, the seventh and last note of valid development is that of "chronic vigour," which has empowered Catholicism to navigate the vast mazes of human error, emerging not only uncorrupted from the beginning but also stronger and wiser for the future. A doctrine of remarkable resilience to time and conflict is evidence of an idea unmovable because it is real and alive. That doctrine which is rooted in Reality Himself cannot help but stand fast, it persists because it is a perfection of *purely active being*, while falsehoods and lies dissipate into the nothingness from which they were summoned by the devil and sin.

While it has already been mentioned that dogmatic theology outlines the most vigorous and unchanging truths of revelation, it will be helpful to examine the *systematic* developments in the theology of woman as well and their relationship to the assimilative and anticipatory tests of this teaching as it presently stands. All such discussion must remember and refer to man and woman's primary equality in dignity, unity in nature, and reciprocity in giftedness and subjection – as *simultaneously* integral and fractional in the image of God. Already in Genesis, there are undeniable anticipations of a teaching on sexual difference, as almost every Church Father attests. It follows from Adam and Eve's different modes of emergence, from their differences in description, their differences in transgression and punishment, that the Creator intended these dissimilarities and

judged them good. Reason alone cannot discern why creation was not otherwise; an asexual human person or hermaphroditic person seem to be sensible alternatives if generation is all that is essential. Yet, what God has efficiently caused cannot be less than perfect. Returning to the example of the Catholic priesthood, which is the only *dogmatic* assertion of sexual difference, Jesus of Nazareth's biological sex offers a secondary but important theological reason for exclusively male orders. In the context of the Church, the term *in persona Christi* specifies Christ's engendered body, like the priest's engendered body, as a material sign of the sacrament of holy orders. Here the disparity between universal priesthood and the 'priesthood' of the husband-father are marked by the "indelible character" and "sacred power" that only a ministerial priest receives.<sup>166</sup>

This everlasting transformation of the person who becomes a priest likewise alters his relation to masculinity, in a sense which cannot be replicated by any male outside of the sacrament. The priest acting *in persona Christi Capitis Ecclesiae* signifies the Bridegroom of Israel giving up his life for the Church. The nuptial analogy of God's covenant with Israel, the New Covenant in Christ, and the soul's espousal to the Holy Spirit, 'swallows up in victory' every lesser form of union. "Since Christ, in instituting the Eucharist, linked it in such an explicit way to the priestly service of the Apostles, it is legitimate to conclude that he thereby wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is 'feminine' and what is 'masculine...'. In this sense, one can say that the Church is *both* 'Marian' and 'Apostolic-Petrine'."<sup>167</sup> There are at least five dimensions to the nuptial analogy: the Trinity espoused to human nature through hypostatic union (God the Son's priesthood); Christ's human nature consubstantially shared with the person Mary (God the Spirit's priesthood), which is also the 'one-flesh' of Christ with the corporate body of the Church; the priest's sacramental union with the laity (ministerial priesthood); the husband's initiative to 'lay down his life' in matrimony (domestic priesthood); and the proclamation of the Gospel in any relationship (individual/universal priesthood). Thus, from the juridical rule of ordination flows a series of cascading analogies, and the full sense of sexual complementarity is captured only in the total picture. Here is the way in which this doctrine is assimilating the genius of its age and anticipating the future. The complementarity of genders is not realized merely in the ontological disposition of male to masculine and female to feminine; it unfolds in the idiosyncratic human person's incommunicable relationship to God and world, Church and family, man and woman, body and

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<sup>166</sup> *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 89.

<sup>167</sup> *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 26, 27.

soul, self-donation and other-centeredness, art and science, contemplation and action, and perhaps an infinite set of infinite sets of masculine to/from feminine relations, though never both at the same time in the same manner. The development of the theology of women, then, preserving the principles of sexual difference laid out in Genesis and in the nuptial themes of the Covenant, has anticipated the sacramental theology of priesthood and assimilated critical feminism. By relegating the lower levels of spousal complementarity to the realm of devotional practice, the Catholic Church has clarified the relationship of self-determination and obedience to gender roles. Obedience is required of the faithful in regard to the ontological associations of masculine-male and feminine-female, however this is no longer a simple metaphysical hierarchy. These ontological orientations can be realized in a potentially infinite variety of expressions, and therefore, require the careful discernment of every individual with the help of the Church. Biologically, men and women are now utterly equal in terms of genetic classification and embryonic contribution. There may be generalized differences between the way males and females *choose* to use their brains to process information and think creatively, but there is little to no evidence that could support the idea of intellectual determinism based solely on sex. Finally, the Church's moral doctrine entirely unvaried in regard to biological sex. There are no sexually delineated sins. The only remaining *dogmatic* gender strictures are the male-sign of sacramental priesthood and the heterosexual consent of marital union.<sup>168</sup>

As Julia Kristeva has stated:

So, is there a feminine genius? The example of twentieth-century women has made it difficult to avoid the question. And it has led us to consider that the anxiety over the feminine has been the communal experience that has allowed our civilization to reveal, in a new way, the incommensurability of the individual. This incommensurability is rooted in sexual experience but nonetheless is realized through the risks that each of us is prepared to take by calling into question thought, language, one's own age, and any identity that resides in them. You are a genius to the extent that you are able to challenge the sociohistorical conditions of your identity.<sup>169</sup>

The devout Catholic would naturally want to add the condition, for both men and women, of an honest surrender to the identity which God has prepared for each of his children from the womb. As Catherine of Sienna famously proclaimed, "Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."

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<sup>168</sup> *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994) officially closed the possibility of further development in the doctrine of an exclusively male priesthood. For the latter doctrine see "Collaboration of Men and Women," 5-6, and CCC 369-72.

<sup>169</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Is There a Feminine Genius?" *Critical Inquiry*, (Spring 2004): 504.

## An Instance of False Development

Liberal feminists propose that the recent alterations in Church anthropology necessitate further changes in the theology of sexuality, in the mode of leveling gender differences more substantially if not in every way. If this were to occur, one result would be that sexual orientation could take on a morally neutral status since its purpose would more often terminate in a multitude of climaxes (not necessarily related to the sexual organs), as the procreative intention and end can only be tied to one specific kind of sexual pleasure. Self-proclaimed transgendered woman Sian Taylder argues “Marian devotion within the Catholic Church has always been seen as a remnant of ultramontanist and a key factor in maintaining the Church’s misogyny and repression of women and female sexuality. The reforms of the Second Vatican Council attempted to drag Catholicism kicking and screaming into the modern era, away from superstition and ritual with a new interpretation of a Christocentric Mary.”<sup>170</sup> The Catholic Church, by continuing to prohibit women from ordination and by insisting on the ontology of sexual variation, has walled itself off from female society. Women are forced into the subjection of masculinity through a husband in marriage or through a Bishop in virginity. But the feminine is more than just the orientation to the other; it is eroticism, sensuality, mysticism, and intimacy. But patriarchal religion has no respect for the “dark side of femininity,” which demands female sexual liberation in a broad spectrum of actualities, including single, hetero, gay, lesbian, and transsexual experiences.<sup>171</sup> In any such case, the feminine should not have to derive its meaning from relationship to the masculine. The development of the theology of woman, in conjunction with the development of Mariology, could be a positive advancement for liberal feminists, if Mary as the archetype feminine be considered in terms of female erotic osmosis, or in terms of a kind of exclusive sexual capacity for Divine stimulation (i.e. the Annunciation).<sup>172</sup>

Although Taylder does not think John Paul II’s theology supports her proposition, she does invoke the popular traditions of Marian devotion in favor of her thesis, indirectly invoking Newman’s preservation of type and conservation of the past. In her view, Mary’s special access to Divinity always implied a particular power of femininity to draw pleasure from Being itself. “Similarly, the role of Mary in Catholicism is directly related to the Catholic conception of the God-

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<sup>170</sup> “Our lady of the libido,” 343.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.



person relationship. Mary is the last remnant of a 'mother worship' that seems to have been the rule, not the exception, when one travels backward in history."<sup>173</sup> Mary Daly, Luce Irigaray, and Adrienne Rich, among other feminists, have argued that without the representation of woman in the Divine, the Church's sexual worldview will be structured according only to male erotic experience. Thus, the sexual encounter of lesbians can function as a litmus test of what truly female sexuality is like:

Irigaray describes women's sexual response as plural, as a 'diversified, multiple, complex, subtle geography', which has fallen victim to a spiritual imaginary rather too narrowly focused on sameness.<sup>174</sup>

Rich extends the term 'lesbian' to include many types of relationships between women. What Rich describes as 'the lesbian continuum' is a deeper and broader experience of the erotic, unconfined to any single part of the body, or solely to the body itself, which allows many diverse aspects of woman-identification.<sup>175</sup>

From the perspective of historical Christianity, it is easy to see that these patterns of female companionship are not just the creation of contemporary social-psychology, but have long roots in partnerships of various sorts between Christian women. 'Lesbian-like' relationships have been described in the women missionary couples of the early Christian communities, in the wider context of women's role in Mediterranean societies, and especially in the 'particular friendships' of women in traditional monastic life.<sup>176</sup>

André Guindon argues that sexual activity should be understood as a language. The berating of the "objective acts" of homosexuality and fear-inducing terms like "disordered inclination" contribute to an ignorant caricature of what sexual expression and communication between human beings can be.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, Margaret Farley does not see how an absolute prohibition of homosexual relationships can be maintained by the Church, since empirical research does not support arguments that these unitive relationships are damaging to society, and because "obstacles raised to same-sex relationships and loves can bring deep and unnecessary suffering to the lives of homosexual persons and partnerships."<sup>178</sup> Thus, the stifling of homosexual relationships also becomes a matter of injustice. In the Christian context, the unitive and procreative ends of sexual union, as well as their sacramental transfiguration into the higher divine analogy, could be extended to homosexual relations by establishing norms of commitment that prevent the objectification of bodies and by

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<sup>173</sup> "With justice and mercy," 368.

<sup>174</sup> E. Ann Matter, "Habemus Corpus: Women's Embodiment, Feminist Spirituality and Catholic Theology--An Essay in Memory of Kevin Gordon," *Theology & Sexuality: the Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity & Sexuality* 7, no. 14 (March 2001): 51.

<sup>175</sup> "Habemus Corpus," 52.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>178</sup> Margaret A Farley, *Just Love: a Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (London: Continuum, 2008), Chapter 7, Section 2.

expanding the command to 'be fruitful and multiply' to include other forms of social creativity. Allegedly, the recent developments in Catholic social teaching of the last few decades has built momentum toward the detachment of complementarity from biological sex and toward broadening gender equality to include a plethora of variously orientated sexual pairs.

According to the Council of Trent, doctrines may be shown to belong to "the word of God handed on as tradition" if 1) they had the Gospel as their source, 2) if they were received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ, and 3) if they have been preserved without interruption in the Catholic Church.<sup>179</sup> Such a revisitation of Catholicism's sexual doctrines was a major project of Pope John Paul II. In his *Theology of the Body*, he referenced directly the Scriptural account of creation and drew from it the model of sexual complementarity already described. Lesbian feminists, however, point to scriptural prohibitions of homosexuality and deem them ambiguous on the grounds that they are concerned with class ethics more than sexual ethics.<sup>180</sup> Of course, historical ambiguity does not make for a strong case. Kyle Harper recounts that, in the development of Christian sexual ethics in ancient Rome, Christians made a decisive break from the regular social pressures, targeting personal free-will and responsibility as the hinge of eternal significance:

The ideas about sex emanating from the new religion [Christianity] marked a discrete and categorical rupture. For the community of the faithful, the pleasures of the flesh became caught in a cosmic battle between good and evil. New rules, more interesting and less predictable than sometimes argued, formed. *Porneia*, fornication, went from being a cipher for sexual sin in general to a sign for all sex beyond the marriage bed, and it came to mark the great divide between Christians and the world. Same-sex love, regardless of age, status, or role, was forbidden without qualification and without remorse.<sup>181</sup>

Even so, Margaret Farley regards the recent shifts in Catholic doctrine as permission to say, at least, that homosexuality is not *absolutely* condemned by the tradition.<sup>182</sup> Following Jean-Paul Sartre's dualist mind-body interaction, Beauvoirian feminism resurrected in new a form the Platonic fallacy of ancient Christian anthropology. In this case, one's nature is the product of one's choices. But John Paul II would not agree. Although his theology puts a much greater emphasis on self-determination, even freedom from the constraints of instinctual desire, the personal subject is nevertheless tightly bound to the masculine or feminine spousal attributes of the body. Adam and

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<sup>179</sup> *The Catholic Priesthood and Women*, 108.

<sup>180</sup> *Just Love*, Chapter 7, Section 2, para. 6-11.

<sup>181</sup> Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: the Christian transformation of sexual morality in late antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 85.

<sup>182</sup> *Just Love*, Chapter 7, Section 2, para. 12-18.

Eve are “*free with the very freedom of the gift*,” an engendered body.<sup>183</sup> Eve is a self-possessed individual, and it is for this reason that she is free to make the offer of herself as the gift that she is. Yet, “she understands herself as possessing a particular value before God.”<sup>184</sup> Summarily, the human body contains intrinsic supernatural value, taking up the biological orientation to reproduce into a resurrected orientation toward the other who is his or her spiritual complement, and this reality is not arbitrarily conferred by one’s own will even though it must be accepted or rejected. This aspect of Papal teaching represents a continuous principle of doctrine from the earliest Church, however poorly it may have been accompanied by cultural prejudices throughout history. In this life or the next, the biologically female person must encounter and incorporate her ontological femininity, articulated concisely as her spiritual maternity, no matter how reluctant she may be to identify with motherhood.<sup>185</sup> Yet, despite this coercion by nature, each woman charismatically builds her own personal expression of the feminine genius, and this is the innovation in doctrine which is both conservative and revolutionary. The homosexual or lesbian experience may hold valuable insights into the kaleidoscope of engendered personalities, but it cannot escape the two ‘eyes’ of the nuptial analogy that God has chosen for human relationships. Just as the development of Christian anthropology has no bearing on the question of male ordination, neither does it redefine the sacramental matter of holy matrimony. In response to Taylder, whatever truth about woman may still lie dormant in the theology of the *Theotokos*, the idea that she herself may be divine is not a type which ever existed in the Christian tradition. Even though Mary preserves and equalizes the spiritual dignity of the feminine qualities, she does not indorse any sense of literal female divinity. But it is *positively* meaningful that divinity is not a genuine quality of the feminine or of Mary. It is of the very essence of the virtue of femininity that it does not desire to be God, but to magnify Him perfectly as a created being.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 185.

<sup>184</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, “John Paul II’s Theology of the Body on Trial: Responding to the Accusation of the Biological Reduction of Women,” *Nova Et Vetera (English Edition)* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 475.

<sup>185</sup> “Indeed, the same human freedom that permits the conscious recognition of the spousal meaning of the body—a meaning that expresses the deepest meaning of the person-self, namely that self-realization requires that one willingly become a gift for others, either in marriage or in consecrated celibacy—does not permit that we redefine the body’s (sacramental) meaning according to our own, subjective will. Just as we cannot reconstruct our bodies in a manner that suits our freedom of self-expression, neither can we choose a sexual orientation that cannot be authentically expressed in our bodies.” *Ibid.*, 482.

<sup>186</sup> “Thus she is ‘the created Idea in the making of the world;’ ‘which, as being a more exact copy of the Incarnate Idea than was elsewhere to be found, was used as the original of the rest of the creation.’ To her are applied the words, ‘Ego primogenita prodivi ex ore Altissimi’ [firstborn from the mouth of the Most High], because she was predestinated in the Eternal Mind coevally with the Incarnation of her Divine Son. But to Him alone the title of

## Conclusion

This study remains incomplete for at least three reasons. First of all, the historical development of the theology of woman cannot be fully apprehended aside from the congruent developments in male gender-identity, which have only been given a cursory glance. For the author, this also implies the need for development in Josephology. But it can be taken for granted that, prior to the twentieth century, the mainstream of academic history evoked an undeniably male flavor. Nonetheless, “masculine” and “feminine,” insofar as they can be considered as abstract principles, have direct reference to one another and are largely (not exhaustively) defined by one another. In order to avoid the hierarchy which ensues in all dichotomous reasoning, they require a third term which can bear the weight of their conflict. Inevitably, that third term must be a form of free moral charity, whether it is instantiated in secular family politics, or in a religious concept like “one-flesh” union. “Man” and “woman” are terms of relation, like the names for the Persons of the Trinity. Herein lies the second short-coming of this essay, that it does not sufficiently explore the possible points of contact between the masculine-feminine dialectic and trinitarian theology. Finally, and most conspicuously perhaps, the author has mostly ignored the effects of Mariological developments on the doctrine of woman in general. It will have to suffice for now to state that Mary’s special status in salvation history has been treated by the Church from opposite and oscillating perspectives: as experientially inimitable, an unclassifiable anomaly, as well as a safeguard against the depreciation of woman’s dignity. Yet, the paradox of Mary as mother and virgin is the inspiration for John Paul II’s elevation of *spiritual motherhood* as the ontological designation of the female sex.

John Paul’s successor Pope Benedict XVI offered “six reasons for not forgetting” that Mary gives “equilibrium of faith” to Catholic Christianity, especially as “conqueror of all heresies:” 1) Mary defends orthodox Christology, 2) Mary expresses the integration of Scripture with Tradition, 3) as a Jewish woman, Mary unites Church and synagogue, 4) Marian devotion balances mind with

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Wisdom Incarnate is reserved. Again, Christ is the First-born by nature; the Virgin in a less sublime order, viz. that of adoption. Again, if omnipotence is ascribed to her, it is a participated omnipotence (as she and all Saints have a participated sonship, divinity, glory, holiness, and worship), and is explained by the words, ‘Quod Deus imperio, tu prece, Virgo, potes’ [What God by command, thou oh Virgin, by a prayer can effect].” *Essay on Development*, 435.

heart, 5) Mary gives a face to the Church and makes the Faith relational rather than abstract, and finally, 6) Mary reveals the essence of femininity and its indispensable role in the Church.<sup>187</sup>

Thus St. Mary is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it; not enough to submit the Reason, she reasons upon it; not indeed reasoning first, and believing afterwards, with Zacharias, yet first believing without reasoning, next from love and reverence, reasoning after believing.<sup>188</sup>

Mary conceives in her womb what she first conceives in her spirit. The Immaculata conceives the immaculate Christ by the power of the “uncreated Immaculate Conception.”<sup>189</sup> Hence, Mary of Nazareth is daughter, mother, and spouse of God. Here the complementary pattern of masculine and feminine generation approaches the mystery of trinitarian Love. In the revelation of creation and salvation it is clear: Adam precedes Eve in the external order of nature, but Eve precedes Adam in the internal order of desire. Similarly, the material universe preceded supernatural humanity and Mary’s redemption preceded Christ’s Incarnation. “What is last in execution is first in intention;” every act of the divine missions increases the Father’s perfection, as from perfection to perfection within perfection. The paradox continues with the doctrine of completed Revelation, which is yet made more perfect in its articulations through history, from Tradition to Scripture to Magisterium and back. “In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”<sup>190</sup>

The “nuptial meaning of the body” functions to illustrate a broader geometrical argument against violations of space, a principle continuous with the conservation of energy. The feminine path is the path of least resistance for the female body-soul. This does not mean that she cannot travel in masculine directions, but it does mean that she will never fit in the masculine as well as a male body-soul can. Language evokes images because the brain itself organizes by geometric networks of connecting “words.” Hence it is important to consider the shape that a word conveys because that shape will become a pattern in the neural web. The same is true for sentences, for theses, and for disciplines. For example, Buckminster Fuller suggested that the English word “line”

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<sup>187</sup> Fr. Johann G. Roten, “Benedict XVI and Mary” (February 20, 2013):

<http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/benedictmary.html>

<sup>188</sup> John Henry Newman, “Sermon XV,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1900), 313.

<sup>189</sup> See, H. M. Manteau-Bonamy, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit: Marian teachings of St. Maximilian Kolbe* (Libertyville, IL: Marytown Press, 2001).

<sup>190</sup> *Essay on Development*, 40.

be replaced by “vector:” “The mathematician's ‘straight line’, defined as having length but no width, simply cannot be demonstrated. All physical ‘lines’ upon closer inspection are actually wavelike or fragmented trajectories: even a ‘line of sight’ is a wave phenomenon, insists Fuller; ‘physics has found no straight lines.’ But forces exist, and they pull or push in a line, which can be modeled by a vector.”<sup>191</sup> “Vector” reflects an image closer to the intended meaning of the word “line.” Perhaps the word “feminine” need not always conjure an image of the nearest female, but it *should* remind one of the innocent Eve and the Virgin Mary, because these are the patterns of association *God has chosen* for his own ideal of the feminine. These are the images that organize one’s thoughts about the feminine according to the mind of Christ. Every created entity submits to the analogy because it *is* ontological. However, to say that every individual female is ontologically feminine is not to say that this unique and personal relationship is utterly communicable. Sexual complementarity is not the image of two parallel lines. It is more like a double helix, that is, two parallel vectors forming a single vector, braided around each other so as to maximize interconnection and minimize the use of space. Mathematically, every braid can be braided again because once braided it then implies the emergence of another symmetrical side. The pattern is thus intelligible and unintelligible at the same time, transfinite, like the Trinity.

In order to expose the danger of an over-simplified binary definition of gender (the quintessential danger of human existence), linguist Deborah Tannen uses the term “complementary schismogenesis.”<sup>192</sup> In masculine and feminine language styles (not exclusive to either sex, but distributed along the expected bell-curves), the stubborn assertion of a masculine style can result in the alienation of those with feminine styles. A pure masculine style communicates on the assumption of hierarchy, while a pure feminine style communicates on the assumption of equality (this sketch is somewhat simplistic, but hierarchy is related to power, logic, and action, while equality is related to connection, emotion, and receptivity). Healthy communication requires awareness of ambiguity in terminology and polysemy in meaning. A ‘masculine’ activity like boxing might be implemented by two males to bring about a ‘feminine’ disposition between them like companionship. A ‘feminine’ exercise like shopping might be used by two females to set up a ‘masculine’ hierarchy of status, like who knows the best stores. This polysemy between masculine

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<sup>191</sup> Amy C. Edmondson, *A Fuller Explanation: the synergetic geometry of R. Buckminster Fuller* (Boston, MA: Birkhauser, 1987), 9.

<sup>192</sup> Deborah Tannen. *That's Not What I Meant!: how conversational style makes or breaks relationships* (New York, NY: Harper, 2011), 129-31.

and feminine can be endless. What is critical to note is that when one or the other communication style loses an interior reference to its complement, it can become sinisterly dichotomous:<sup>193</sup>

For a simple example of complementary schismogenesis in conversation, imagine that one person is talking slightly louder than the other. If their styles are similar, one or the other or both might adjust their level of loudness so they'd end up more or less the same. But if their ideas about how loud it's normal to speak are different, each speaker will be made uncomfortable by the other's volume. The slightly louder one might try to encourage the softer one to speak up by getting a little louder—to set a good example. And the slightly softer one might try to encourage the louder one to speak more softly by setting a good example of softer speech. As each tries harder to remedy the situation, one gets louder and louder while the other gets softer and softer until one is shouting and the other whispering. Each unintentionally provokes the other to intensify the offending behavior.<sup>194</sup>

Thus, one must be able to transport up or down a level of complementarity in order to best serve the other and meet him or her in charity. This is the 'vector' of identity; it may have a set (ontological) direction based on biological sex, but it is neither static nor unbroken, and is ultimately a piece of a larger vector. But the masculine and feminine traits cannot be maximally expressed without being anchored in *and* drawn out by each others' contraries. Hence, there is an overriding significance of unity and communion in the theologically correct understanding of sexual complementarity. Constant reconnecting with the other (God, spouse, friend, nature, etc.) returns one to one's self with a fuller identity-image.

Although feminist theologians are trending away from the binary view of sexuality, there is an important sense in which the common denominator of reality will always be relationally binate. The simplest, fastest, most energy-efficient language is binary code. Why binary? Because every possible truth can be communicated through an interaction of contraries that is open to relationship with other pairs, multiplied exponentially. 0 is to 1 as 01 is to 11 as 011 is to 111, and this can continue for infinity multiplied by infinity. What is infinity multiplied by infinity? A pantheistic Trinity. At least that was what many neo-Scholastics accused Georg Cantor of when he discovered this trans-finite set theory. But it is accepted today as a basic mathematical principle. What is often overlooked is that there is a hidden third term that really makes every binary into a trinity, since each coupling is always open to an 'other' coupling that transcends the original dimensions of the first pair. In binary code, every number has an infinite set of infinite reciprocals. Philosophers know this same paradox as the one and the many. In linguistics it is called the polysemy of language. The key is

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<sup>193</sup> It might be said that Satan is an archetype of masculinity cut off from the feminine by pride. Lucifer's "masculinity" is perverted because it looks for no complement, it asserts itself against God's will like a determined principle even more unyielding than gravity.

<sup>194</sup> *That's Not What I Meant!*, 129-30.

to think of the third term as a new logic, as in the logic of childhood, incarnation, or sacrament. The point is not to mathematize relationships, but quite the contrary, to raise the most basic form of reason into the analogy of Holy Family. The nuptial unity of reality flows from the basic shape of its poles, masculine and feminine, which exist on multiple dimensions, in physics, in nature, in the individual, in the couple, in the Church, in society, and, with necessary distinctions, in God Incarnate. Of course, the analogy terminates before God as Trinity, since the Godhead “prior to” creation had no parallel masculine or feminine relations.<sup>195</sup> Hence, the infinite sets of sexual pairs do not begin with God per se, but with Christ’s human nature and God’s covenantal condescension. The male then is not meant to be a sign of aseity or the Godhead, though it *is* a sign of Christ. Yet, Mary is a truly symmetrical complement to Christ’s perfection in so far as she remains first among contingent beings.

Alfred North Whitehead orchestrated an especially ingenious system for understanding reality as multi-leveled societies of bi-polar entities. Buckminster Fuller accomplished similar feats with his “synergetic geometry.”<sup>196</sup> Cross-disciplinary dialogue in trinitarian theology is important here, as a proper understanding of complementarity will be much helped by a proper understanding of third terms as vestiges of Holy Spirit. Christian theologians should wish to avoid a bipolar schematization of sexuality as much as they avoid binitarianism in the Trinity. The problem of de-subjectifying the Holy Spirit is well documented.<sup>197</sup> Firstly, participation of the created universe in the reality of God can only be analogical. “Being is God’s good gift and we can speak of Being’s kenotic self-donation in beings. Infinity is depicted not as negating human finitude but, more positively, as divine excess, as that fullness and fecundity that creates and sustains, taking on and transforming the contingent human condition.”<sup>198</sup> Analogical participation makes for a genuine encounter with the living Lord, so that God’s being must remain transcendent of and *also* ordained to the nuptial categories. It is particularly the Holy Spirit’s economic mission that entails the

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<sup>195</sup> Referring here to the apophatic nature of the Blessed Trinity.

<sup>196</sup> See, Amy C. Edmondson, *A Fuller Explanation: the Synergetic Geometry of R. Buckminster Fuller* (Boston, MA: Birkhauser, 1987), and Marc A. Pugliese *The One, the Many, and the Trinity: Joseph A. Bracken and the Challenge of Process Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

<sup>197</sup> See, Thomas G. Weinandy, *The Father’s Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), and, Gavin D’Costa, *Sexing the Trinity: Gender, Culture and the Divine* (London: SCM, 2000).

<sup>198</sup> Declan Marmion and Rik Van Nieuwenhove. *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 218.



stitching together of time and eternity, humanity and Godhead.<sup>199</sup> The Second Vatican council “exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel Spirit.”<sup>200</sup> Renunciation of certain freedoms cannot be avoided, even in Christ, for to create is to sacrifice *and* to die is to Resurrect. Through baptism, the Holy Spirit indwells in the human soul as the energy and impetus of a will that dances from Love to Love in freedom, which is always also the fulfillment of the individual. Hence, the third ‘person’ of the nuptial analogy can be called reciprocal-generative-freedom. Openness to the life of the literal or metaphorical ‘child,’ and acceptance of the responsibility entailed, cannot be severed from the union of masculine and feminine itself, as this diffusion is simply what Charity does, in imitation of Divine excess. Sarah Coakley articulates this trinitarian vision in her recent systematic endeavor into the theology of desire. Her understanding of the gender binary mirrors the point here made:

The Christian tradition has, of course, been constantly tempted to figure the difference of gender straightforwardly on the latter difference: to align ‘masculinity’ with God and ‘femininity’ with the world (and so to subordinate women to men, while tacitly undermining their status as fully redeemed). More recently, some feminist theology has attempted – in reaction – to model gender on the former difference – straightforwardly to *emulate* a trinitarian ‘equality in difference’. The position proposed here is that neither of these more familiar alternatives is possible, nor even obviously mandated by the complex authorities of Scripture and tradition. Rather, in the case of human gender there is a subtle transformation of both models caused by their intersection: the ‘fixed’ fallen differences of worldly gender are transfigured precisely by the interruptive activity of the Holy Spirit, drawing gender into trinitarian purgation and transformation. *Twoness, one might say, is divinely ambushed by threeness*. This is *not*, I must strongly underscore in closing, a theory of a ‘third gender’, or a theory either of the insignificance, or obliteration, of gender. On the contrary, it is a theory about gender’s mysterious and plastic openness to divine transfiguration.<sup>201</sup>

Christian anthropology, therefore, continues to develop a more sophisticated understanding of human *esse*, always in the image and growing in the likeness of God. Too often, personal identity

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<sup>199</sup> “Here lies the particularity of the Spirit’s *hypostasis* in the Trinity, according to [Colin] Gunton. The Spirit makes the triune communion a free *perichoresis*, where the one and the many, being and relationship, person and substance coincide as one God. The Spirit is the agent of freedom and particularity in the Trinity, as Gunton correctly reminds contemporary theology. He brings to our attention that the Spirit wipes away separation and crosses the boundaries between beings without dissolving their mutual integrity. The Spirit creates and protects particularity in the face of homogenization. He transfers the relation with the other from a relation of subversion into a relation of self-designation. He is constitutive of the particular relations of the Son to His Father and to His church. The Spirit transforms Jesus’ historical relations into particular relations, which reveal one and the same Son of God. Similarly, the Spirit grants freedom to the people of God, a freedom that, according to Gunton, ‘derives from their institution into a new, particular, framework of relationships.’ Pneumatological particularization makes the church a community of a distinct nature.” Najeeb G Awad, “Personhood as particularity: John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton, and the trinitarian theology of personhood,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 19-20.

<sup>200</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 43.

<sup>201</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'on the Trinity'* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013) Chapter 1, section 8, para 5.

and social status have been established by contrary dispositions of sexual desire or different physical generative capacities. If human beings were merely sexual creatures, if they were only upright animals, than patriarchy would be inevitable (even if women became men). It is not so. The locus of identity depends on the end of existence. If one exists only for this world, then total self-determination and sexual amorphism might be sensible for the person. But if it is true that the highest end is to share in the knowledge and love of the Father God, then conformity to that end must by definition influence the identity of individuals as their essential and final cause. In most feminist gender theories, it is assumed that one must detach from restricting social mores in order to discover identity and purpose within the self. In the Scholastic framework it was taught that one must detach from the concupiscence of self in order to discover and discern objective realities. While the former has more complex content, it has a faulty method. The latter was built on outdated science, but had a superior hermeneutic. When Aquinas explicated the cooperation of *intellectus* and *ratio* within the *mens*, the *actus purus* of non-contingent Being, and the subsistent relations of the trinitarian Persons, he was allowing nuptial analogy to form his mental patterns and his systematic theology. He remains an indispensable reference point for modern theology. Conception in the heart precedes birth in word and deed. God formulates the balance between masculine and feminine on infinite levels, in each human psyche, in each human relationship, in each marriage, in each community, in the Church, in the ecosystem, and in science. Since the promise of diversity is everlasting, the limitations of each expression should incite no envy.

In conclusion, the author proposes a trajectory for future development in theological anthropology and systematic theology as a whole. The scientific paradigm has matured immensely in the last fifty years. Some scientists allege that humans and animals can no longer be strictly divided on the basis of self-awareness, rational thought, emotive powers, or even language. Supposedly, these characteristics exist on a continuum from single-cell to human, and may not be *qualitatively* different from one to the next.<sup>202</sup> In like manner, the earth's ecosystem is not a reality distinct from human embodiment. Many thinkers today, including eco-theologians, stress the dire necessity of building sustainable and synergetic relations with nature, a plea that contradicts entrenched habits of 'Enlightenment' domination (different from Biblical "dominion"). "No adequate theological anthropology can ignore the importance of the ways we think about our place in the world nor can it avoid the implications of a mistaken sense of disconnection between humans and the natural

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<sup>202</sup> *Anthropology*, 140. This issue is highly debated.

world.”<sup>203</sup> Neuroscience is another related field that has much to contribute to the theology of the human person. Despite the popularity of strictly empiricist philosophies within this community, there are also many scientists who argue convincingly for forms of “emergent monism” not unadaptable to a Christian metaphysics.<sup>204</sup> Work in fractal geometry by Benoit Mandelbrot and Stephen Wolfram present models of integral complementarity in nature and mathematics, reinforcing the self-propelled fruitfulness of polarity and unity in cohabitation.<sup>205</sup> Personality theory and biochemical physiology are other fields that can contribute to the theology of the body as well. “The Christian cannot simply stand by and ignore these issues. They all raise theological questions. Indeed, they *demand* theological responses.”<sup>206</sup> The trajectory here proposed is to seek resolution in some or all of these issues through the ordering principle of generative complementarity.

John Paul II’s theology of sexuality is no reiteration of ancient Greco-Roman misogyny. It is not *primarily* an argument for the conservation of space or energy – very crudely realized in the geometrical interlocking of male and female bodies (though this fact is not without significance). The ontological orientation of the female to femininity, the so-called feminine genius, may be in a woman’s soul, in her body, in her personality, and in her vocation in very different manners, with different shapes and, therefore, different kinds of “spouses.” The paradox of the feminine genius lies in its attention to the personal encounter, which necessarily *preempts* the abstraction of masculine and feminine categories. Thus from the feminine perspective in particular, a definition of woman eludes idealization, as the individual person or concrete moment is experienced as *mystery and dignity first*. Nevertheless, a human being is a spirogenetic or incarnate mystery, and therefore, woman is capable of and called to communicate herself for the sake of love, just as God has ordained himself to be ‘for us.’ The subtle interplay of freedom and determination in Catholic sexual teaching awaits specialized theological and pastoral excavation through this feminine and Marian hermeneutic.

Finally, it is the author’s thesis that the nuptial analogy provides the best trilateral pattern for *all* networks of human science because its neural image is the only conceivable picture of a non-

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>204</sup> See, *Anthropology*, 144-48, and Amit, Goswami, Richard E. Reed, and Maggie Goswami, *The Self-aware Universe: How Consciousness Creates the Material World* (New York, NY: Putnam's Sons, 1995), Andrew B. Newberg, and Mark Robert Waldman. *How God Changes your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2009), Dean Radin, *Supernormal: science, yoga, and the path to extraordinary psychic abilities* (New York, NY: Deepak Chopra Books, 2013), and John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity : the Christian encounter with reality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>205</sup> See, Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science* (Champaign, IL: Wolfram Media, 2002).

<sup>206</sup> *Anthropology*, 154.

contingent Love that is Reality itself (not to mention it is also the favored analogy of the sacred page). Some psychoanalysts have even made the argument that sexual complementarity should be as primary a logical principle as non-contradiction.<sup>207</sup> Through this method, one might work toward a systematic theology of the Holy Family. The Catholic faith is a divine Love affair so ontologically intimate as to be one nature, ‘one flesh,’ one idea, one system, one spirit, and one God, simultaneously and infinitely diffused by this single source and then infinitely interrelated to each expression. What is of *greatest* importance for the trinitarian nuptial analogy of masculine-feminine-fruitfulness is that God has chosen it, God has sacramentalized it, specifically in Matrimony and Holy Orders. As the essentiality of the spousal mystery becomes more and more realized through these sacramental portals, so the tripartite nature of Love-Reality is being gently unveiled. For this reason, the normalizing of the spousal analogy is a Christian moral imperative. This is the point at which the light of the Catholic faith outshines all other suns. The Bethlehem star-child is really a quasar, drawing a whole universe of trinities into its singularity, ultimately eclipsing all distinctions except for persons, who if they are human, are everlastingly male or female. Any creature that does not follow this design of I AM, in fact, does not exist. Only one can *lead* the perichoretic dance and he calls himself ‘Our *Father*.’

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<sup>207</sup> See, Jane Alexandra Cook, *Sex, Metaphysics, and Madness: Unveiling the Grail on Human Nature and Mental Disorder* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013).

“The many become one and are increased by one.” – Alfred North Whitehead

*My soul takes pleasure in three things,  
and they are beautiful in the sight of the Lord and of men;  
agreement between brothers, friendship between neighbors,  
and a wife and a husband who live in harmony. – Sirach 25:1*

“The special maternal charism is to give birth to Christ in men’s souls.” – Paul Evdokimov

*And Mary said,  
“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;  
<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.” – Luke 1:46-49*

“Art is limitation; the essence of every picture is the frame.” – G.K. Chesterton

*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. – Ephesians 5:21*

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