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God entrusts the human being to the woman

Mulieris Dignitatem, n. 30

Seminar

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Foreword

The twenty–fifth anniversary of the publication of John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* is a wonderful opportunity to give new impetus to reflection on the issue of women in today’s world. The importance of the document is perhaps even more apparent today than twenty–five years ago. That is why the Pontifical Council for the Laity convened the Seminar in October 2013 on the theme “God entrusts the human being to the woman”, taken from paragraph 30 of *Mulieris Dignitatem*. The anthropological reflection offered by this important document of the magisterium was prepared by Pope John Paul II for his memorable Wednesday catechesis on the “theology of the body” held in the early years of his pontificate.¹ As we know, *Mulieris Dignitatem* was drafted in response to a suggestion by the Synod of Bishops that was held in 1987 to discuss the subject of the lay faithful. It was published three months before the post–synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* which collected and reworked the results of that important Synod. There is a close connection between the two documents. In Cardinal Ratzinger’s presentation of *Mulieris Dignitatem*² when he was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he placed the document in its natural context. He highlighted in particular the close relationship with the two ecclesial events that determined its essential profile. In addition to the Synod on the laity, to which we have referred, there was also the Marian Year, then in progress. He also pointed out that it was written in a context of cultural anthropological crisis that was emerging at that time. The future Pope Benedict XVI regarded the fact that it had been intentionally promulgated in advance of *Christifideles Laici* as being of utmost importance for

¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, US 2006.

² Cf. J. Ratzinger, “La donna – custode dell’essere umano”, in: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1 October 1988, 1, 11.

the understanding of the document on women. That is because this demonstrates full awareness that the institutional and practical issues related to the vocation and mission of women in the Church and in the world should have a sound anthropological basis established on biblical foundations and theological status. In addition, the Marian Year powerfully attracted attention to the origin of the Church and its mission, making clear beyond any doubt the primary task of women in the history of salvation, admirably summarised in the Virgin Mary. The document, through a deep scriptural journey, lays solid foundations in order to formulate the specific and irreplaceable nature of what is called the feminine genius, an attitude that belongs to every woman and that shines in a unique way in the Mother of the Lord. It is essential and crucial both for the Church and for human society. Cardinal Ratzinger concluded his presentation with words that recall the central ideas of this publication: “Women are protectors of human beings and their humanity: this is the programmatic declaration and passionate appeal that led to this important document”.³ The prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith used these words to emphasise not only the cultural and social value of what was said in the document, but especially its theological depth.

Mulieris Dignitatem is proposed, therefore, even more now than then, in the context of globalised anthropological confusion, as a sure guide to recognise and recover the true value of women for the benefit of humankind as a whole. At this point it is worth rereading something that Saint John Paul II wrote: “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 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”.⁴

³ *Ibid.* 11.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

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A little further on he adds: “In our own time, the successes of science and technology make it possible to attain material well-being to a degree hitherto unknown. While this favours some, it pushes others to the edges of society. In this way, unilateral progress can also lead to a gradual loss of sensitivity for man, that is, for what is essentially human. In this sense, our time in particular awaits the manifestation of that ‘genius’ which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human! – and because ‘the greatest of these is love’ (cf. *1Cor* 13:13).”⁵ For the Polish Pope the vocation of women to care for others is clearly manifested by Revelation: “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.⁶ The inclusion of the vocation of women in the order of love emerges decisively from a Christological root: “If the human being is entrusted by God to women in a particular way, does not this mean that Christ looks to them for the accomplishment of the ‘royal priesthood’ (*1Pt* 2:9), which is the treasure he has given to every individual? Christ, as the supreme and only priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, and as the Bridegroom of the Church, does not cease to submit this same inheritance to the Father through the Spirit, so that God may be ‘everything to everyone’”.⁷ We must recognise, however, that perhaps the central idea of entrusting humanity to women, expressed with such clarity in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and being so rich in theological implications, has not yet been adequately appreciated by theologians studying the topic of women in recent years.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Mulieris Dignitatem did not become an isolated text of the magisterium. It has shown the way for further developments by Benedict XVI and recent interventions by Pope Francis. During his pontificate, Benedict XVI spoke several times on the issue of women and men in the world today. Particularly significant was his speech to the Roman Curia on the occasion of the exchange of Christmas greetings, a few months before he resigned from the Petrine ministry. On that occasion, Pope Benedict said, in somewhat dramatic tones, that today the view of human nature and what it means to be men and women is being seriously called into play: “People dispute the idea that they have a nature, given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being. They deny their nature and decide that it is not something previously given to them, but that they make it for themselves. According to the biblical creation account, being created by God as male and female pertains to the essence of the human creature. This duality is an essential aspect of what being human is all about, as ordained by God. This very duality as something previously given is what is now disputed. The words of the creation account: ‘male and female he created them’ (*Gen 1:27*) no longer apply. No, what applies now is this: it was not God who created them male and female – hitherto society did this, now we decide for ourselves. Man and woman as created realities, as the nature of the human being, no longer exist. [...] The manipulation of nature, which we deplore today where our environment is concerned, now becomes man’s fundamental choice where he himself is concerned. From now on there is only the abstract human being, who chooses for himself what his nature is to be. Man and woman in their created state as complementary versions of what it means to be human are disputed. But if there is no pre-ordained duality of man and woman in creation, then neither is the family any longer a reality established by creation. [...] When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God, as the image of God at the core of his being. The defence of the family is about

man himself. And it becomes clear that when God is denied, human dignity also disappears. Whoever defends God is defending man”.⁸

Pope Francis, for his part, insists often on the human vocation to care for each other.⁹ In his homily during the Mass for the inauguration of the pontificate, he said, “The vocation of being a ‘protector’, however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. [...] Whenever human beings fail to live up to this responsibility, whenever we fail to care for creation and for our brothers and sisters, the way is opened to destruction and hearts are hardened. Tragically, in every period of history there are ‘Herods’ who plot death, wreak havoc, and mar the countenance of men and women”.¹⁰ Pope Francis also echoed some of the teachings of Benedict XVI when he drew attention to “human ecology, closely connected with environmental ecology. We are living in a time of crisis; we see it in the environment, but above all we see it in men and women. The human person is in danger: [...] hence the urgent need for human ecology! And the peril is grave, because the cause of the problem is not superficial but deeply rooted. It is not merely a question of economics but of ethics and anthropology”.¹¹ The theme of the centrality of the care of humanity is echoed in the *Urbi et Orbi* message at Easter 2013: “How many deserts, even today, do human beings need to cross! Above all, the desert within, when we have no love for God or neighbour, when we fail to realize that

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Roman Curia, 21 December 2012.

⁹ In this regard it is worth recalling the attempt by the so-called “Care ethics” to enhance the concept of care, custody and nurturing the other. This approach which emerged in the context of North American feminism, tries to overcome an individualistic mentality and false opposition between autonomy and dependence. It emphasises that interdependence is an essential and positive component of the person. Therefore it is clear that “Care” has decisive social implications and should then find a much more extensive space in culture and politics. See: J.C. TRONTO, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, New York 1993.

¹⁰ FRANCIS, Homily during the Mass for the inauguration of the pontificate, 19 March 2013.

¹¹ IDEM, General Audience, 5 June 2013.

we are guardians of all that the Creator has given us and continues to give us”.¹² Talking to reporters on the plane back from Rio de Janeiro, the Holy Father touched on the issue of women. He noted that there is often a risk of reducing the debate on this subject to the issue of the functions that women could or should play in the ecclesiastical sphere: “All we say is: they can do this, they can do that, now they are altar servers, now they do the readings, they are in charge of *Caritas* (Catholic charities) ...”. The issue is much wider and deeper. The Pope emphasised that “we need to develop a profound theology of womanhood”.¹³

The Pontifical Council for the Laity, thanks to the work of the Women’s Section, for a long time now has been committed to following the cultural changes and challenges that affect the life, dignity, vocation and mission of women in society and in the Church.¹⁴ The reflection and the experience of recent years have increasingly and more clearly shown the intimate connection between the question of the identity of woman and that of man. Our focus, therefore, has been to concentrate on the reality of the human being as such, created male and female by God, and the mutual complementarity of the sexes. It is only in this perspective that we understand the feminine question. It is clear that the proper advancement of women can be carried out only in the recognition of reciprocity and the mutual need for male and female gifts in the key areas of family, society and the Christian community.

The contributions that we have collected in this publication present, as we have already mentioned, the topics expounded and

¹² IDEM, *Urbi et Orbi* Message for Easter, 31 March 2013.

¹³ IDEM, Press conference during the return flight from Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013.

¹⁴ Cf. *The Logic of Self-giving, International Meeting “Women”*, Rome 1996, ed. Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City 1997; *Men and Women: Diversity and Mutual Complementarity*, ed. Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, Vatican City 2006; *Woman and Man: the Humanum in its Entirety*, ed. Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, Vatican City 2010.

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discussed at the Seminar on “God entrusts the human being to the woman” organised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. The programme was intended to enhance and develop the teaching of the Church that resulted from *Mulieris Dignitatem* twenty-five years after its publication. It was also to comment on its extraordinarily current as well as universal value, and its ability to meet the needs and questions now emerging more forcefully not only from women, but from all humanity. The method used was to alternate keynote speeches with panel discussions and open discussion in order to ensure the widest possible participation by the highly qualified audience. We can now say that this decision was rewarded beyond expectations. Many had an opportunity to speak and join the lively and often enthusiastic debate. The quality of the interventions from the floor matched that of the talks given by the invited speakers. Unfortunately, these contributions will not appear in this publication. For editorial reasons it cannot contain more than the official speeches. However, all that was said at the Seminar has become part of the intellectual and spiritual heritage from which the Women’s Section intends to draw inspiration in order to define the lines of its reflection and choices for future programmes.

The first talk was given by Livio Melina. He gave an in-depth account of the theological weight and anthropological consequences of the guiding theme of our Seminar: “God entrusts human beings to women in a special way”. In the afternoon we focused on the crucial points and contradictions of the culture in which we are immersed. The rapid evolution of the image of women and their role in society was presented primarily through the talk given by Helen Alvaré. Then some relevant and urgent issues were discussed, some related to the status of women that affects the whole of society, such as the effects of the sexual revolution (Lucetta Scaraffia), the eclipse of the concept of female identity and, even more, male identity (Ángela Aparisi), the spread of the “culture of death” (Ligaya Acosta), the nature and challenges of the current educational emergency (Franco Nembrini) and the subjectivist outcome of legislation and current law (Gabriella Gambino).

The talks and discussions on the second day were very proactive. The meeting was opened by Jocelyne Khoueiry who spoke of the role of women in building the civilisation of love. The talks that followed were given by Gilfredo Marengo, Giorgia Salatiello and Oana Gotia. These were very helpful in clarifying the prospects to be pursued, such as the recovery of the concepts of nature and identity, the relationship between the concept of the person and sexual difference and the need to present fundamental ethical issues with methods that are appropriate to society today and contemporary culture. The talks that followed each came from experience. From different points of view they highlighted the experience of extraordinary yet ordinary Christian women in the difficult context of today's relativist society in every part of the world. Vicki Thorn, Costanza Miriano, Marisa Lucarini, Virginia Parodi and Jane Wathuta dealt with the Christian view of sexuality and how it can be presented to youth in an appealing way, male and female human maturity, the value of motherhood, life as a gift of self and what must be done in order to achieve adequate legal protection of the family and life. The second day concluded with an unscheduled and truly exceptional item. Professor Nembrini, a well-known Dante scholar, gave an enlightening and touching description of the portrayal and the role of women in Dante's Divine Comedy. He gave an admirable summary of the profound meaning of the theme of our meeting through the masterpiece of one of the greatest poets of world literature of all time. We have included this valuable contribution in this publication after transcribing it from the recording.

On the third day, Helen Alvaré and Giorgia Salatiello summarised the results of the Seminar. They highlighted the most important ideas that emerged from the talks and discussions, and they pointed out the potential to be developed in the cultural work of the Seminar participants and the Pontifical Council for the Laity. In particular, they pointed out that a need was seen to give greater importance to the logic of love than that of power, a task particularly suited to the genius of women, and the duty to develop, on the solid basis of

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Mulieris Dignitatem, a more profound theology of the feminine, only possible if related to a theology of the masculine.

The high point was certainly the audience with the Holy Father at the conclusion of the Seminar. In his speech, Pope Francis confirmed us in the faith and reaffirmed the principles that we had discussed during our sessions together: the specificity of the feminine genius that comes from the singular gift of motherhood, not to be understood reductively in a biological sense, but as an existential dimension that characterises the whole person—woman in every phase of her life, expressed as a special capacity for acceptance and love. It is an immeasurable asset not yet valued enough in society and in the Church itself. The Pope also clarified the meaning of his well-known desire for an adequate theology of the feminine. He said that “*Mulieris Dignitatem* is set within this context, and offers a deep and organic reflection with a solid anthropological basis illuminated by Revelation. It is from here that we must endeavour once more to deepen and promote an undertaking that I have wished for many times already”.¹⁵ Other roads taken in the past on the theology of the feminine, that may have wanted to ignore *Mulieris Dignitatem*, proved to be dead ends.

I think that I am interpreting the opinion of all those who participated in the Seminar when I express sincere and deep gratitude to the Lord for the experience of authentic ecclesial communion that He has given us. The Seminar, in addition to its intellectual content of the highest level, was an opportunity to establish bonds of friendship and fruitful collaboration that will mark our reflection in the coming years and initiatives for the enhancement of women’s roles in the Church and in the world. The experience that united us was the fact that we were personally touched by the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It is this that encourages us to engage in working for humanity. The Church must not ignore the suffering and confusion of women and

¹⁵ FRANCIS, To participants in a Seminar organised by the Pontifical Council for the Laity on the 25th anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 12 October 2013.

Stanislaw Rylko

men of all times, and must not hold back from the mission to show ways to the recovery of the meaning of the existence, dignity and true freedom of every human being. Each of us is called, in our own environment, to concrete commitment in favour of humanity. So we can conclude with these very significant words spoken by Benedict XVI: “The seriousness of our faith in God is shown [...] in a very practical way by our commitment to that creature which he wished in his own image: to man. We live at a time of uncertainty about what it means to be human. Ethics are being replaced by a calculation of consequences. In the face of this, we as Christians must defend the inviolable dignity of human beings [...].As Romano Guardini once put it: ‘Only those who know God, know man’. Without knowledge of God, man is easily manipulated. Faith in God must take concrete form in a common defence of man”.¹⁶

CARDINAL STANISLAW RYLKO

President

Pontifical Council for the Laity

¹⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Ecumenical Prayer Service in the church of the former Augustinian Convent – Erfurt, 23 September 2011.

Address of Pope Francis
to the participants in the Seminar
received in audience

Clementine Hall, Saturday, 12 October 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

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

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

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

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

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

Francis

I. LECTURES

God entrusts the human being to the woman in a special way: John Paul II's great insight

LIVIO MELINA*

“Woman, here is your son” (*Jn* 19:26). These words that Jesus spoke as he was dying on the cross, words addressed to his mother entrusting her with the beloved disciple John, included with John all of the emerging Church. This is certainly the scene that inspired the great anthropological insight that John Paul II placed at the centre of his apostolic letter on the dignity and vocation of women *Mulieris Dignitatem*: God entrusts human beings to women in a special way (cf. no. 30). Vatican II called her “Mother of Christ and mother of humanity”,¹ and this theological truth about Mary’s universal motherhood was further developed in this papal document which has important anthropological significance. It embraces the essential vocation of every woman with regard to the *humanum* as such, for it is this that she is called to cherish. Yet it goes further. In John Paul II’s apostolic letter, this anthropological significance is also explained as a cultural historical judgment on the contemporary world. It thus has the nature of an appeal to the mission of women, made urgent by the times that humanity is living through in which the future is at stake.

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¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* no. 54, also quoted in: JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 23.

This assertion in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the object of our reflection at this time, needs to be explored in all the three dimensions just mentioned: the theological, anthropological and historical-cultural. They are intimately intertwined to a point where they condition each other mutually and together give light to the hermeneutics of this declaration. Nevertheless, I think it is fair to distinguish them in order to gradually approach the meaning of the statement. Since we must always be aware of our historical contingency as we go forward in our search and aim to access the meaning of our existence, we shall start with how the statement is judged at the level of society and contemporary culture, and then we shall proceed to the basic anthropological elements and so arrive at its theological meaning. Of course, these will only be ideas to fuel more thought and research. Further insights are badly needed.

AN OPINION ON TECHNOCRACY AND SECULARISM

It may be useful to introduce here in this evaluation of the contemporary world, a sharp observation made by the great Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar in his essay *Love alone is credible*. After noting that the ability to see the original imprint of divine love in created nature is preserved only when the sign of God's absolute love is perceived in the Cross of Christ, he goes on to say: "But whenever the relationship between nature and grace is severed (as happens... where 'faith' and 'knowledge' are constructed as opposites), then the whole of worldly being falls under the dominion of 'knowledge', and the springs and forces of love immanent in the world are overpowered and finally suffocated by science, technology and cybernetics. The result is a world without women, without children, without reverence for love in poverty and humiliation, a world in which power and the profit-margin are the sole criteria, where the disinterested, the useless, the purposeless is despised, persecuted and in the end exterminated; a world in which art itself is forced to wear the mask and features of technique".²

² H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation*, London 1970, 114-115.

“A world without women and without children” is a world in which the sacramental character of creation disappears and where the forces of love succumb to the programmes of a totally technological domain, in the name of production efficiency and power. The issue of women is therefore placed here, not as a partial theme, but as the central issue for the destiny of humanity, precisely with regard to the totality of human beings’ relations with the world, with other human beings and ultimately with God. It therefore should not be seen simply in the context of justice, as a matter of equal rights, but must be placed in the perspective of the ontological meaning of existence, where only the recognition of reciprocity in difference allows for the preservation of the order of love in relationships among human beings.

Von Balthasar’s observation sees the root cause of this desecration of love to be in the denial of the sacramental character of the world and in the loss of the symbolic value of creation which is at the origin of a radical dualism between God and the world. Where the world is no longer perceived in its relationship with the Creator, nature is no longer a *mater* in which to discover and respect a meaning. It is only matter that soon becomes simply material for a programme of total manipulation through a desire for power.³ The ambiguous relationship established by modernity between knowledge and *posse* (Bacon’s *scire est posse*) implies a knowledge model in which outward analysis, fragmentation and dominance over reality are preferred. The primacy of profit and of doing means that reason is perceived only according to its technical and functional dimension. It is about producing effective means, since there are no longer purposes to discover and respect.

Perhaps the pinnacle of the global enterprise of modern science should be given to biotechnology applied to humanity itself. Here the human being ends up as material for a promethean experiment of integral manipulation or even of total re-creation of oneself. Human

³ According to a study by H. JONAS, *Dalla fede antica all'uomo tecnologico*, Bologna 1991, 262.

beings thus become the subjects of their own experimentation, according to the famous Nietzschean statement made by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. But what has this to do specifically with the issue of women? In what sense are they entrusted with a future in which humans may be preserved from the fatal danger of inhuman post-humanism?

It should first be noted that the contemporary manipulation of humanity has its starting point in the control of human sexuality and procreation by reducing it to a simple reproductive issue.

It is particularly revealing and disturbing to read the claims of Pierre Simon, former Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Lodge of France, a gynaecologist. In his book with the catchy title (*De la vie avant toute chose*), he presents the overall concept that has guided efforts in social medical intervention undertaken by a group of experts since the mid-fifties. They aimed to transform not only medicine, but also, and also through, biotechnology, culture and society: “We are well aware that this battle is not only technical, but philosophical. Life as material... this is the beginning of our struggle [...]. The revision of the notion of life, introduced by contraception, will transform society as a whole”.⁴

Now this transformation is no longer just an eerie prophecy, but a reality that is before our eyes. One has to wonder if such a situation is also the result of a kind of feminism that has misunderstood the terms of its historical mission and renounced the prophetic role that could have been undertaken for the sake of an authentically human culture and society. It may be that the understanding of the liberation of women only as an abstract claim of gender equality and therefore in dialectical terms of democratised autonomy, has perhaps led to a loss of the role and mission of women in society as a whole. The acceptance of the manipulation of the body, sexual relations and procreation as tools for emancipation, has perhaps led to exaggerated individualism and the loss of the relational identity of femininity.

⁴ P. SIMON, *De la vie avant toute chose*, Paris 1979, 84–85.

The extreme outcome of this is to be found in gender theory.

John Paul II, in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, says that “one can have no adequate hermeneutic of man, or of what is ‘human’, without appropriate reference to what is ‘feminine’” (no. 22). In order to understand and take on the essential mission of women for all that is human, we must therefore follow the line of full appreciation of difference, or in the words of significant currents of thought within the feminist movement “thinking the difference”,⁵ as the basis of a relationship, which alone allows us to understand the human in its complete truth.

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FEMININE

Gender distinction is not a superficial phenomenon that concerns the body in an accidental way. It embraces what a person is and its significance is essential. Even more than the body, it concerns the soul in that it shapes personal identity, advances interpersonal relationships and determines a specific mission. In this second part of my reflection, I would like to focus on the anthropological significance of the feminine. This is not to revamp a romantic exaltation of the “eternal feminine”, which in the end only serves to camouflage sexism, something that has not yet been surmounted. It is rather to grasp the profound reason for reciprocity and for the specific vocation by which “God entrusts human beings to women in a special way”.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* succinctly states that it is women's mission to safeguard the order of love (no. 30).

The essay by Von Balthasar that we cited above speaks about the features of this order which are gratuity, humility and poverty. In this context, in the polarity of the sexes and in the phenomenology of sexual relations, the dimension of receptivity and willingness to

⁵ Cf. L. IRIGARAY, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, London 2005, 8.

accept others intimately is usually associated with the feminine.⁶ In the tradition of scholastic philosophy followed by Aristotle, the receptive disposition of the feminine was interpreted as “matter” and “power” and therefore substantially imperfect. Consequently it was viewed in negative terms. Now, however, the great theologian from Basel is opposed to this long tradition. He does not interpret receptivity as a liability, but rather as a key activity and therefore it is perfection. It is a specific perfection of created beings. This is necessary for a full understanding of love insofar as receiving is an indispensable prerequisite for created beings to be able to give themselves.⁷

Feminine receptivity therefore expresses a characteristic of created beings before their Creator: acceptance of God’s love, being witnesses and protectors, in an attitude of gratitude and praise. In this sense, as the Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann claims, women’s mission is to safeguard the sacramental or symbolic structure of the world, and to celebrate a cosmic liturgy of praise to the Love that is source of all love.⁸

Here we can grasp the deep root of historical analysis presented previously: the authentic alternative to secularism and to the technocratic manipulation of the world is found only in the rediscovery of the feminine genius and its basic attitude of loving obedience.

Here we can use a triple scan approach to show how this attitude is expressed, one that is perfectly carried out and represented by the Virgin Mary, the perfect archetype of every creature. First of all, it is fulfilled as an asymmetric responsibility of creatures before their

⁶ Cf. G. ZUANAZZI, *Temi e simboli dell'eros*, Roma 1991, 35–54.

⁷ Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, vol. V: The Last Act*, San Francisco 1998, 66–91. See also: D.L. SCHINDLER, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church. Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation*, Grand Rapids 1996, 237–274.

⁸ Cf. A. SCHMEMMANN, *For the Life of the World*, New York 1998, presented by D.L. Schindler; “Liturgy and the Integrity of the Cosmic Order: The Theology of Alexander Schmemmann”, in: *Ordering Love. Liberal Societies and the Memory of God*, Grand Rapids 2011, 288–309.

Creator. They recognise the absolutely central nature of this gift that makes them capable of loving in return. Secondly, it brings about reciprocity with divine action working within them and with which they can cooperate. Finally, this mutuality makes way for inherent fecundity that can generate life in the world. The possibility of self-giving is thus based on the fact that it is a gift from that Other. The paradox here is undeniable: autonomy and freedom of individuals is possible only because of the presence and action of that Other in them.

In that sense, John Paul II stated that “woman, as mother and first teacher of the human being, has a specific precedence over the man” (no. 19). It is their special closeness and communion with the mystery of life that entrusts them with this mission of witness and endeavour (no. 22) concerning the call to love, the sense of body and the destiny of creation itself. This is why we can say that through her sin, Eve, the mother of all who live and the antitype of Mary, erred in her very being as a woman. In this way she betrayed the mission received from God, for God entrusted human beings to women in a special way. They were now abandoned to the powers of manipulative forces and at the same time subject to them.

THEOLOGICAL AND ECCLESIAL PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN'S VOCATION

“He will rule over you” (*Gen* 3: 16). The loss of the original reciprocity between man and woman, caused by original sin, in favour of a relationship of confrontation and domination, brought about the loss of the mission that belongs to women. The subordination of women continued down through the centuries. It is disturbing to see how it is present in the history of religions, and even in the history of the Church. Some currents in feminist theology, having started out with more than justified issues, have now added to their agenda the opening of the ordained priesthood and leadership roles within the Church to women. However, here again, an innovative proposal like this is actually assuming that the priesthood is an exercise of power. It

ends up by regarding the empowerment of women as offering equal opportunities for access to government, without paying attention to the symbolic significance of the difference and therefore the specific value of women's vocation in the Church.

In fact, the consequence of a mentality that favours efficiency, organisation and power, is precisely the "clericalism" that afflicts the Church as one of the evils, ancient and ever new, from which its members who hold authority should be converted. It indicates an exercise of ecclesial power that is separated from a sense of service. It has been emptied of the spirituality of Mary's *fiat*. Its roots are to be found in a loss of a sense of the primacy of gift and grace. We could continue with von Balthasar's reflections on the contemporary era and say that clericalism is a Church "without women and children", without listening, without wonder, without gratitude and without service. Yet it is these that are the essential features of the Church, the Bride of Christ, in a Marian attitude of loving obedience.

John Paul II's document *Mulieris Dignitatem* clearly reiterates (in no. 26) what was said in the declaration *Inter Insigniores* published in October 1976 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by authority of Pope Paul VI on the non-eligibility of women to the ministerial priesthood. However, it does (in no. 5) speak of the specific mission of women at the ecclesial level. Through the royal priesthood of the people of God, every woman, with Mary, is called to live and witness to the fact that "to serve is to reign", as we are told by the Second Vatican Council.⁹

All the symbolic depth of sexual difference can thus be detected in the mystery of the Church and its relationship with Christ, as well as the whole of humanity with God the Creator. While in God the mystery of generation always goes beyond gender and cannot have sexual connotations (no. 8), sexual difference belongs to created beings who are in the image and likeness of God (no. 7). In this

⁹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 36.

way, humanity is always basically “feminine” before God, while in reference to the relationship between Christ the Bridegroom and the Church his Bride, the mystery of reciprocity between man and woman is truly great (cf. *Eph* 5: 32). If in the Church the feminine availability of loving and spousal obedience is more decisive than the representative function of the Bridegroom as Head, then, according to von Balthasar’s theology, the Petrine principle of authority in the Church is always secondary and subsidiary to the Marian principle.¹⁰ According to Saint Irenaeus of Lyon’s great insight, Mary is the *typos* of the Church, “the universal *concretum* of the Church, in the same way that Christ is so for divine sonship”.¹¹

We can say in a very strong and meaningful way that the ministerial priesthood of every priest is entrusted specifically not only to Mary, but also to every woman, because in the Church they are called to safeguard the fundamental meaning of the royal priesthood of all the baptised faithful. It does so precisely because it bears witness to the supernatural order of love, in which ministry also must be dimensioned. It bears witness to the absolute primacy of the divine gift of grace, the fundamental character of the Eucharistic attitude of praise, directed towards self-giving, in the care and service of the poor, the urgency to give themselves so that, as Christ prayed, “that all of them may be one... so that the world may believe” (*Jn* 17: 21).

When Jesus was on the cross he gave the beloved disciple John to his mother Mary in a far more radical way than he asked John to take care of his mother. Indeed, John was entrusted to Mary before Mary was entrusted to John. In this way the mystery of the Church and of humanity is entrusted to the Mother. She is also the Woman *par*

¹⁰ Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, San Francisco 1986, 204–225. See also: C. GIULIODORI, *Intelligenza teologica del maschile e del femminile. Problemi e prospettive nella rilettura di von Balthasar e P. Evdokimov*, Roma 1991.

¹¹ This was quoted by von Balthasar, taken from A. MÜLLER, *Ecclesia–Maria*, Fribourg 1951.

excellence, who is in labour until the end of the world and resists the dragon in order to give birth to the body of the Church (cf. *Rev* 12).

Woman is entrusted with the Church and with the humanity of every human being. She is also in a particular way entrusted with us, the human beings of our day, contemporary humanity.

Pope Francis invited us to meditate on the word “protect” in the Mass he celebrated for the beginning of his Petrine ministry as bishop of Rome on 19 March 2013. He applied this term to Joseph, spouse of Mary, because his mission was to be “protector of the Redeemer”. He also applied it to Saint Peter, the first of the apostles, for he and his successors were entrusted with the protection of Jesus’ flocks.

But what would all these male protectors be if they were not supported and protected and their task made possible by the mission of Mary, for she kept and preserved in her heart the Word of the Lord and nourished it in her body to the extent that she gave birth to the eternal Word of God, Jesus the Saviour.

Changes in the “image” of woman in history: has the contemporary woman given up her role?

HELEN ALVARÉ*

It is an honor and a genuine challenge to be asked to speak on the evolution of the image of women in light of the role of “entrustment” proposed in *Mulieris Dignitatem* as women’s essential vocation. Even broaching the subject causes to flash before my eyes a panoply of scholars and authors, saints and activists, women and men, all of whom have addressed questions about the dignity and vocations of women, both currently and historically. Much has been said already. So what can I offer you, considering especially the “dangers” of reductionism, subjectivism, stereotypes and the dangers of slighting historical periods or regions of the globe, all of which are inherent in any attempt to speak about women’s nature or roles? Not to mention the explicit rejection, post-Simone de Beauvoir and others, of the very notion that there is such a thing as “essence” or “nature” or “roles” or “vocation” where women are concerned... all such conclusions being claimed to flow from patriarchal control not only of society, but of all relevant academic disciplines.

With humility then, and in the brief time we have together, I offer the following.

First, I will speak of the major categories in which women have been “classified” “defined,” or “imaged,” particularly as distinguished from men, throughout most of recorded history (thanks to the marvelous philosophical and theological works of Sister Prudence Allen, Edith Stein, Michele Schumacher and others).

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Second, I will try to identify and then contrast the way that feminisms – especially of the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – “received,” and “interpreted” these classifications, in the way that *Mulieris Dignitatem* and some other works of the Church did so. Here I will highlight *Mulieris Dignitatem*’s teaching about the feminine vocation to “entrustment”.

Third, I will conclude with observations about re-proposing the framework and the innovations of *Mulieris Dignitatem* amidst our current situation and the signs of our times.

THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN HISTORY

First then, let us look at the major categories used to “classify” “define” or “image,” women, particularly as distinguished from men, throughout most of recorded history.

It is true that there are persistent images of women offered by the leading philosophers, theologians, satirists and saints throughout history. Not surprisingly, these images are often structured in the form of comparisons or contrasts between men and women. Here they are. Women are “first”, followed by men: Body/mind; Body/rational faculties; Matter/spirit; Domestic or private sphere/public sphere; Practical/intellectual; Intuitive/rational; Concrete/abstract; Detail-oriented/big-picture; Local/national; Linear-thinking/complex and wide-ranging thinking; Follower/leader; Passive/active; Dependent/independent; Receiver/giver; Invisible influencer/visible influencer; Gentle/rough; Weak/strong; Nonviolent/violent; Calming/provoking; Virtue/vice; Vice/virtue; Tempter/tempted; Tempted/tempter; Innocent/worldly; Relational/individualistic; Communitarian/individualistic; Collaborative/hierarchical; Scattered/focused.

I am fairly sure you could add to the list if we reflected together on this for ten more minutes. Now you can see from these categories that it is only with respect to very few of them – perhaps violent/nonviolent, virtue/vice, tempter/tempted (the latter two which seem to switch places over time) – that one might conclude axiomatically that women

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have been assigned the lesser place. There are more than a few of these dichotomies, which, particularly with our modern sensibilities, would lead us to understand that women hold the higher place: maybe those characterizing her as intuitive, calming, innocent, relationally oriented, and collaborative. Some feminist authors and activists share the responsibility for gaining respect for these qualities.

Many of the dichotomies, however, do not immediately open the door to any judgment respecting superiority or inferiority except within particular historical or cultural frameworks, or following the acceptance of certain *a priori*s about what is good or useful. These might include the dichotomies: body/mind, private/public, follower/leader, receiver/giver, and a few others.

We don't know if these judgments will persist. It depends in part upon what caused them, and how societies unfold in the future. Might such rankings disappear when the world no longer needs physical strength for as many crucial tasks? Or will they persist in a world which accords outsize value to power, material wealth, fame, and technological advances, or in societies determined to hold to earlier customs? Will the sex links reverse or perhaps alter in some cases as women perform nearly all functions previously associated with men? Whatever the future holds, however, I think, we can still say at this moment, that respecting almost all these dichotomies, perhaps especially in the West and in the North of this world – though increasingly globally – so-called feminine traits are still considered inferior, less useful, less intrinsically meritorious and less “appealing” than those possessed by men. I think we can also say that in many places around the world, and on the bases of these dichotomies and rankings, women will continue to be excluded from education and from roles in leading social institutions, and that their permitted fields of action will continue to be cabined. No consideration will be given for what women may feel vocationally called to, have a natural aptitude for, or what they may need to access in order to earn a living or help another.

Both later twentieth century feminism and *Mulieris Dignitatem* refused to accept these historically-received dichotomies at face value with their “greater and lesser” rankings. One might think that this would endear *Mulieris Dignitatem* to a wide swath of feminists, but it did not. For by the time it appeared, while later twentieth century feminism had taken a variety of approaches to smashing the old dichotomies, the majority of its leading forms expressed hostility, or at best indifference toward any reflection on women which linked women and care for the human person in any special way. Consequently, no matter that *Mulieris Dignitatem* insisted upon women’s equality with men, and affirmed a “feminine genius,” its conclusions involving the “entrustment” of human beings to women were not embraced by the feminist establishment in privileged countries, or at international institutions with influence in less privileged countries.

It was surely to be expected that some feminisms could not resist extreme forms of reaction against these historical dichotomies, reactions born in some cases of righteous anger, and ready to destroy whatever existed previously and was “man-made.” Some were even ready to destroy the most “telling” evidence of sexual difference – women’s maternal capacities – a move which led, ultimately, to an attempt to silence religion, or at least convince women that the Christian God and his celebrated Mother, Mary, could not be friends to women. We saw such a backlash in the second half of the twentieth century I will first describe these reactions, and then turn to the innovative and unexpected response offered by *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

FEMINIST REACTION TO THE TRANSMITTED IMAGE OF WOMEN

Here is my extraordinarily brief treatment of an extensive secular feminist reaction to prior images of women.

First of all, some feminists opted to recommend women’s “putting on” any identified male traits she did not already possess. In some cases this was accompanied by the assertion that there were no essential differences between male and female, irrespective of any empirical

or experiential data. All differences were rather products of social construction. In this view, complementarity is also a fiction, and so too is any kind of male/female interdependence, as it was projected that men lived really "independent" of women.

In some cases this was accompanied by advice to reject maternal roles in particular, as the surest path to avoiding a patriarchic-determined female role. In other cases, there was simply little attention paid to the matter of motherhood, but attention lavished rather upon a valorization of the workplace – especially workplaces men had disproportionately populated – and places of worldly power – business, politics, academics, media, etc. On the other hand, the kind of work that women had disproportionately assumed – teaching, nursing, social work, etc. – was overtly or subtly disparaged by comparison with typically male work. In these narratives, women's work at home was valued for the most part because it highlighted her capacity to do it all, that is, to do what men had traditionally done while also doing what women had traditionally done ... the sum total of which painted a picture of female superiority. Some feminists combined any concession to women's continuing to perform domestic work with a demand that men share perfectly equally in domestic and childcare labors. This remains a touchstone of current secular feminism.

Another feminist reaction valorized identified female traits as superior to male traits. There were women who took this second path to reaffirming women's undisputed suitedness for motherhood beyond and unmixed with all other tasks any woman could undertake. Sometimes they went further, and advised men to adopt identified female traits in order to be more virtuous. This was not a prominent reaction, and in some cases it was "over the top," – toward creating a situation in which children's real needs were obscured in favor of demonstrations of maternal accomplishments.

There was probably a somewhat more prominent response to the valorization of feminine traits. This was the notion that the superiority of the "feminine" could potentially "save" heretofore male-dominated institutions from the error of their ways as the influx of

women would change their ethics and results. In my humble opinion, institutions formerly devoid of women have not really changed their ethics or results over the past several decades now that women are present there. A bit more on this later:

It should be observed in summary fashion that in the case of both leading variations on secular feminism, the path chosen was conflict, not collaboration, with men. It should also be observed that especially privileged men, speaking often from important public platforms, affirmed and encouraged one or more of these variations.

Now I will ask: what were some of the practical fruits of the secular feminist reaction to images of women?

A common response was the opening of various opportunities and institutions to women: education at every level, citizenship in the form of voting and female politicians, employment of almost every kind... all of which gained acceptance in many nations, though not all. A variety of reasons account for much of the lack of reception of these ideas, among them cultural, economic, political, practical and religious reasons. It is also possible that reception of the better proposals of secular feminism was hindered, too, by cultures' and nations' fear of importing, alongside these, what came next under the banner of feminism – more controversial proposals, still robustly disputed even in the countries legally enshrining them. By these I mean proposals to separate sex, marriage, childbearing and family life, all in the name of women's freedom. The groups promoting this made them the centerpieces of efforts "for women," and devoted disproportionate resources and public attention to them. Efforts to achieve this next set of goals as a matter of women's rights are very apparent at the United Nations, with the result that more privileged and sometimes less religiously self-identified nations seek to impose these ideals upon less privileged and/or more overtly religious nations via regional bodies and "customary international law."

This controversial set of goals proceeds under various banners or themes: for example "rendering women's bodies like men's" or "giving a woman control over her own body or her fate," or "voluntary" or

"safe" motherhood. The bottom line was this: separating sex from procreation in women, as it was separated in men, most particularly via contraception, abortion and so-called "reproductive-health" education without parental involvement. A second theme emerged over time alongside this first: sexual expressionism, that is, the celebration of any consensual sexual expression as happiness-creating, and even identity-forming ... as this was presumably men's experience of sexual expression. Contraception and abortion were deemed necessary for this goal, because the threat of procreation and childrearing itself, and perhaps even marriage, robbed sex of its potential for freedom, for joy and for self-expression. Claims for the "goods" of choosing prostitution or appearing in pornography, for sex-change surgery, for normalizing cohabitation and same-sex "marriages," all flow today from this goal.

Eventually, these "equality" or "privacy" or "nondiscrimination" rights respecting sex, were accorded the status of legally recognized human or civil rights for women ... rights which could not only command recognition from fellow citizens, but which, it was argued, the state should fund, including by coercing religious citizens and institutions' cooperation in some cases, as we are now experiencing in the United States.

By this logic religion became the enemy of women. In the U.S. and at the U.N., in fact, authorities sometimes say that religion is "waging a war on women," because the philosophy of sexual expressionism – sex as a good in its own right, utterly disconnected from relationship not only with the child, but increasingly with the man, is contradicted by several leading religions, including ours. Any religion which speaks of given human nature, or differences between the sexes, of women "receiving" gifts from the hand of God or from men, of insisting that while biology is not destiny, neither is it infinitely manipulable, any religion which reveres a woman as the Mother of God (all the worse because she is a mother instead of God), the Mother of us all, the Mother of the Church, is problematic from this viewpoint.

MULIERIS DIGNITATIS BRINGS SOMETHING NEW

Secular feminists, however, were not the only group reacting to earlier depictions of women. Bravely – to say the least – and based upon decades of reflection with and about women and men, John Paul II offered an extended meditation on women in *Mulieris Dignitatem*. How did it interact with earlier characterizations of women? This is hard to answer simply. Perhaps I could say that due to the sources it consulted, particularly Revelation, but also due to the hierarchy of values it pronounced, it “transcended” preexisting dichotomies. It succeeded in identifying the dignity and equality and special gifts of women without harming men or children. This was new. Previous advances for women were often purchased at the expense of, or by ignoring, others’ well-being. *Mulieris Dignitatem*’s “relational” framework, however, avoided this by characterizing each person’s identity and capacities as gifts to be given to others (as each person had first been gratuitously gifted by God).

Here are some leading ways in which *Mulieris Dignitatem* accomplished what it did.

First and most significantly, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (and of course the Theology of the Body series), innovated our understanding of the meaning of being created in the “image and likeness” of God in two ways. Previously, human beings’ free will and capacity for rational reflection were the nearly – exclusively – celebrated aspects of our “imaging God.” This state of affairs advantaged men, given that the field of opportunity for men publicly to exercise these faculties was vastly greater than the field open to women, by law and cultural practice. However, *Mulieris Dignitatem* and the Theology of the Body highlighted that human beings image God importantly in their being made in and for relationship... in relationship in the sense that women and men together image God, not one to the exclusion of or without the other. In Genesis we find the observation that before the creation of the woman, the man’s solitude was “not good.” (*Gen* 2:18). In both the Old and New Testaments, God is described with both paternal and maternal traits. Theologian Margaret McCarthy has a wonderful

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analysis of this relational aspect of *imago Dei*;¹ she analogizes the relationship between men and women to that between Jesus and his Father, about which it is said that Jesus did “not deem equality with the Father something to be grasped” (*Phil* 2:6). How could this be? Just as how could it be that women are equal to men “without grasping”? She interprets this to indicate that the question of men’s and women’s equality must also be answered in a relational context. To wit: the Father is a father by virtue of having a son and the Son a son by virtue of having a father. Applying this analysis to men and women: each is the only one fit to be of mutual help to the other in the ontological and other senses. Each is the only one who can make the other a parent with the “help of the Lord.” (*Gen* 4:1). Each needs the other to understand more about who God is.

Once this human imaging of the Trinitarian God as relational is brought to the fore, then not only are men and women essential partners in imaging God, but also the woman’s capacity to bear new life, and her special gift of attention to other human persons can be identified and valorized. The old dichotomies’ instinct to rank traits is transcended, in favor of seeing them in light of one another, and as interacting in the manner of mutual gifts.

Closely related to this first accomplishment is a second: while *Mulieris Dignitatem* eschews rankings of various gifts or traits, it easily affirms the existence of differences between men and women. This transcends the inclination of history to rank, and of secular feminisms to avoid acknowledging differences because of the belief that they inevitably lead to rankings. *Mulieris Dignitatem* accomplishes this by framing any differences as gifts received, in order to be given by men and women to one another, and to all whom they encounter.

Third, *Mulieris Dignitatem* boldly asserts that love is the meaning of life and that women are first or “prior” in the “order of love,” the

¹ M. McCARTHY, “‘Something not to be grasped’: notes on equality on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*”, in: *Ave Maria Law Review*, volume 8, issue 1, Fall 2009, 121–152.

first to be “entrusted” with new life (cf. nos. 29–30), to acknowledge the presence of, to nourish and to nurture, life. It bases its conclusions not only upon the fact of women’s fertility, but also upon women’s demonstrated gifts for acknowledging persons. This last is a source of real knowledge, alongside Revelation and the structures of our created bodies. This recognition of the woman’s gift for loving other persons means, John Paul II claims, that the woman in a sense teaches the man his fatherhood. (no. 18). She teaches, but does not lord it over him, but enables him to give the gifts men give to their wives and to children and to the world. This feature of *Mulieris Dignitatem* – its claim that women are gifted with a capacity for the person, and its simultaneous insistence that loving service is the meaning of life, “upends” the entire historical inclination to account feminine traits as lesser, both because they are feminine, and because the ranking assumes that worldly goods and power are the measure of success, rather than the capacity to love well.

Fourth, *Mulieris Dignitatem* “redeems” the body while not exalting it as higher than the spirit or the soul. Previously, because of the body’s mortality, and its other limitations and failings, women’s association with bringing forth new life, and caring for persons, were accounted against them. From this flows what we still see today: women’s bodies treated as “things,” as “property.” Thus there is prostitution, thus violence against women, thus pornography, thus trafficking, thus demands in so many cases that women submit to uncommitted sex or cohabitation as the price of a “relationship” with a man. But *Mulieris Dignitatem* brings the body into the economy of salvation, teaching that it images a God-in-relationship, that it points toward the good of the male-female union, points also toward the social context of every human life, and shares in God’s procreative activity. So *Mulieris Dignitatem* does not agree or disagree with the old characterizations of women’s association with the body; it rather re-interprets the meaning of all human bodies, and therefore women’s and men’s experiences of them, and their interactions with one another and with the rest of the human family

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Fifth, *Mulieris Dignitatem* identifies men’s tendency to dominate women as men’s original sin in relation to women, versus what many had believed that the Church taught: that male domination was the natural order. John Paul II has even asserted that because the world valorizes domination, men’s original sin is rendered harder to overcome than women’s, which is possessiveness of those given to them and the willingness to try to establish a relationship with a man on a basis less than equality and mutual gift. Women’s sinful inclinations are not similarly valorized in the world. *Mulieris Dignitatem*’s meditations on original sin have the effect of a tunnel dug underneath the entire edifice composed of the historical rankings of claimed differences between men and women. They indicate that such a building should never have been constructed in the first place and suggest an alternative blueprint, a plan for the construction of a good building: acknowledging sexual differences, yes, but for the purposes of mutual gift-giving between men and women, and between each of them and their “neighbors” in the world, both in thanksgiving for the gifts given each by Christ, and in reverence to Him. Likewise, it must be acknowledged that original sin colors male-female relations in this world.

CONCLUSION

I hope I have established that some very powerful images of women’s roles or traits have persisted in history, some to the present day I have also stated that these were “received” quite differently by John Paul II, and by various feminist thinkers operating outside a Christian framework. I would now like to conclude with a few thoughts about where one might go from here on the matter of women’s “roles,” in light of the signs of our times. Obviously, this is a huge topic to which I can bring only preliminary reflections for your further consideration. I will make seven points.

1. I think the word “roles” may be irreversibly tainted in the modern world. Pope Benedict XVI has suggested elsewhere that this

might be the case.² It may be wiser then to speak about women's gifts or capacities or fruitful fields of action; all in relation not only to her own happiness and freedom, but always also in relation to her God-given vocation and to the happiness and freedom of all those who might benefit from her gifts, both in the family, and in the larger society.

2. Future reflections about women gifts need to be framed far more often in the context of the gifts that men and women bring to one another. Thanks in particular to John Paul II and to Benedict XVI, and to lay and religious women and men writing about the gifts of women over the last 40 years, there is a burgeoning literature on women. But the world is changing for men, revealing some new difficulties not only in labor markets, but in "marriage markets" if you will. One would not wish to see a movement concerning men which repeated a leading failure of some feminisms – e.g. failing to think of men and women as necessary collaborators but as combatants.

In this same vein, society has paid some but too little expert attention to the workings of complementarity between men and women in the context of marriage and parenting. Insights from Revelation could significantly illuminate such research. But still almost nothing is done on the question of what complementarity means in every other arena in which men and women are regularly operating together today. Demands to welcome more women into various spheres are weaker than they would be if it were better known what women and men together could accomplish. As I noted earlier, there was early speculation that feminine traits would leaven a wide array of arenas newly open to women, yet there is pitifully little exploration of this topic. A further exploration of this subject might reveal, for example, that women's gifts and experience do and could further significantly assist the Church and the world respecting health care, education,

² Cf. J. RATZINGER, "On the Position of Mariology and Marian Spirituality Within the Totality of Faith and Theology", (trans. Graham Harrison) in: H. MOLL (ed.), *The Church and Women: A Compendium* (Ignatius Press, 1988), 76, where he says that difference between the sexes is often interpreted as simply "strengthening of the role"; see also J. RATZINGER, *God and the world: Believing and living in our time*.

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pro-life, charitable services, anti-war and anti-capital punishment movements, and perhaps especially today in services to the elderly and in addressing global migration and trafficking problems, considering women’s capacity to enter into the sufferings and needs of some of our currently most defenseless global populations.

3. The secular feminist response to women’s historical inequality is hurting poor and vulnerable minority populations and children the most; this needs to be shouted from the housetops. Rejecting stable relationships with men, rejecting marriage, and normalizing nonmarital childbearing – all are among the leading causes of poverty, sexually transmitted infections, shorter life span, violence against women, child suffering, and intergenerational downward mobility. No policy regarding poverty can hope to succeed without attending to this. This has become clear over the last several decades’ “natural experiment.”

This is all the more unjust as the economically and educationally privileged themselves opt for marriage and marital childbearing, and more often avoid cohabitation, violence, abortion and divorce. But they refuse – in the words of American sociologist Charles Murray – to “preach what they practice” from the pulpits available to them as heads of every leading social, political, academic, media and economic institution. There should be something akin to a new civil rights movement for vulnerable women who are called to marriage and children, but effectively prevented from attaining these due to harmful or absent economic, educational, familial and other policies and customs applicable to women and men in poor, uneducated and minority communities. Here, there is a particularly urgent need to move past secular feminist agendas toward *Mulieris Dignitatem’s* anthropology of women.

4. Women have to be active participants in the movement for religious freedom around the world. This is because religious freedom is threatened in the name of women’s rights, and also because women’s rights are sometimes threatened in the name of religion. In developed nations in particular, religious freedom is threatened on the grounds

that religious opposition to sexual expressionism harms women. Women have to be seen and heard witnessing otherwise.

In less privileged nations, women need to participate in the complex task of both promoting religious freedom, while simultaneously opposing tendencies to obscure or deny women's God-given dignity which may proceed under the banner of religion. In these latter situations, there is important work to be done in assisting some authorities, both within religious and secular institutions, to understand that they can and should embrace authentically pro-women reforms, while denying false claims that women's equality requires the deinstitutionalization of marriage and the family, and the rejection of children via abortion and massive social contraception programs.

5. We have had a more or less "natural experiment" over the last several decades, allowing us to observe what happens when a substantial number of women can choose how they wish to spend their lives. Here are some preliminary results:

– One: women still wish for the most part to marry and to have children.

– Two: women are happy to exercise their talents outside the home as well as in it.

– Three: when they are mothers, most women prefer to work part-time, or in cycles responsive to their children's needs, although there are always some who wish to work full-time, as well as many who must, economically speaking. This is a growing and strong feature of our present times.

– Four: still, for the most part, governments have asked women and children and families to make the greater sacrifices if they wish to have children, rather than enabling women and men to put their families first if they are also working outside the home. Governments have rather emphasized women's freedom not to have children or to have fewer children via contraception and abortion. Leading feminist groups have adopted the same priorities. Both governments and self-described women's groups need to be called to account for this.

The opportunity costs of these priorities are the dearth of policies in most – though not all – countries which value the caretaking work of full-time at-home mothers, or the caretaking work of mothers and fathers working also outside the home.

6. Women are still voting with their feet disproportionately to work in the classic “caring–professions” as teachers, nurses, social workers, etc., and are now adding to that list, lawyers, doctors and politicians. There is no doubt that several of these are historically underpaid, perhaps because they were populated by women. But while it is not only fair to open all manner of employment to women, and while it is true that women bring a necessary perspective to every field they enter, the caring professions should not be denigrated on the grounds of pay or power. It is possible to address the matter of fair pay, and to insist upon increased social respect for caring work, without denigrating the essential good of such work or women’s apparently perennial attraction to it. Furthermore, modern empirical data is confirming the beneficial effects, not only of attending to the importance of stable relationships in personal lives, but of participating in labor imbued with meaning as human service.

7. Finally, women seem naturally suited to communicate Pope Francis’ stunning calls to re-energize the Church’s mission to serve the dispossessed of this world, a mission involving rejecting materialism, in favor of a renewal in all institutions of the model of servant leadership. Women’s natural gifts – as interpreted by *Mulieris Dignitatem* – as well as their centuries of experience of work directly with the marginalized and also women’s example of enduring love, in the model of Mary our Mother – make them natural leaders and communicators in all of these areas. Interestingly, although Popes John Paul II, and Benedict XVI and Francis have made few detailed observations about the shape of a new Christian feminism...all have observed that its method is not “domination” or “machismo.” That is, it is not by way of imitation of men’s original sin. A successful new feminism would rather be one which would cause the world to take seriously the notion that progress and freedom and dignity are achieved when persons and institutions

operate according to the rule of losing oneself in the service of God and one another. Women are brilliantly placed to communicate the power of the Gospel to free human beings from man-made strictures, by way of the power of love as a cycle of entrustment and fidelity. An important caveat here. Many admirable theologians have written about an opposing phenomenon. Not only John Paul II in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, but also Marguerite Peeters and Cardinal Walter Kasper have noted that the struggle for the cause of the human being is often waged first via the woman. This is the underside of her role as the one to whom the human being is first “entrusted.” Around the world today, it is the woman who is urged – often by self-proclaimed women’s champions, but of course also by men – to abort her child; it is the woman who, in many countries, is urged to distrust men generally; it is the woman who initiates divorce proceedings even in the majority of marriages not marked by violence; it is the woman who is assured that nonmarital childbearing is morally neutral, and that labor market accomplishments are more important than children. In short, it is women who are urged to deny the fundamental truth – which they are rather gifted to express in a privileged way – that human life is fundamentally about relationship, not autonomy. This is not an absolution of men, who, as John Paul II has emphasized, are regularly the invisible participants in women’s sins. But – keeping my focus on women’s obligations as a function of her gifts – it is an identification of areas where women could be exhorted to lead the way, to move toward prioritizing again the demands of love. Interestingly, empirical data indicates that women, were they to understand their power and to act in concert, hold the power of the “seller” (if I might) in the marketplaces for sexual relationships, marriage, and labor. Were they to act accordingly and to make demands of men, of employers, and of governments... they would serve not only their own interests, but also the interests of the neediest including children and poorer women – and vindicate the cause of the human being to a greater degree.

Changes in the “image” of woman in history: has the contemporary woman given up her role?

It is not weakness, not bowing to the “demands” of the Church, for women to do this, but cooperation with internal logic of the laws of freedom, which is coextensive with the law of love. Women, not men, have the power and therefore the duty, to so insist.

Women's role in building a civilisation of love in the light of Church teaching

JOCELYNE KHOUEIRY*

A SIGN OF THE TIMES

The term “civilisation of love” was first used by Pope Paul VI and was confirmed as a concept and mission by Pope John Paul II who dedicated a large part of his papal ministry to this objective. It is linked to the tragedies that marked the twentieth century and our contemporary social and cultural context with the huge challenges it presents to the dignity of the human person and peace in the world. We only have to look back to the recent past to find examples like the two world wars, political attacks in the United States and Europe, the Arab–Israeli War, the Vietnam War, the economic crisis, the Cold War and the arms race. We also had the events of May 1968 in France and the consequences they had on the values accepted in Europe and worldwide until then. We saw an increase in the most radical feminist currents at the same time as scientific discoveries in the area of reproduction and genetics that opened wide the way for a new culture of “well-being”. This came at the expense of the dignity of human life that was undermined by the proliferation of contraceptives, the legalisation of abortion, genetic manipulation and the negation of the differences between men and women in the name of blind egalitarianism.

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All of this led to the birth of gender theory which has now brought about so-called “marriage equality”. Similarly, it is important to note the new challenge presented by globalisation that has transferred control of the economy to a supranational level. It has changed the role of the state by promoting the detachment of the economy from society and politics, and thus it inflicts a heavy blow on solidarity that was founded on the national social contract. Paradoxically, far from serving the happiness and dignity of human life, this process plunges contemporary human beings into individualism that cuts social ties and makes people indifferent to the presence of their neighbours. Pope John Paul II spoke of a culture of death that grows in our hearts when the eclipse of God turns humanity away from our fundamental truth.¹

In the midst of these dangers that threaten the fate of humanity, the Church looks to women as they are called *mothers of life*. They are asked to remember their vocation because once it is recovered and redeemed, it can contribute to finding the right road.

Since Vatican II and the *Letter to Women*, Church teaching has not ceased to urge women “imbued with the spirit of the Gospel”² to assume their vocation and specific mission, essential for the reconstruction of the civilisation of love written on the hearts of human beings by Our Lord, Creator and Redeemer. Considered a sign of the times, the Council, which upheld the dignity of women and their equality with men, announced that “the hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved”. In addressing the different categories of women, the Message continues: “You women have always had as your lot the protection of the home, the love of beginnings and an understanding of cradles. You are present in the

¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 21.

² PAUL VI, *Message to women at the closing of the Second Vatican Council*, 8 December 1965.

mystery of a life beginning. You offer consolation in the departure of death. Our technology runs the risk of becoming inhuman. Reconcile men with life and above all, we beseech you, watch carefully over the future of our race. Hold back the hand of man who, in a moment of folly, might attempt to destroy human civilisation”.³

IN MARY'S FOOTSTEPS

The civilisation of love is based on love of God who created man and woman in his image and likeness, calling them to build the world and humanity in the “gift of self” breathed into them by his Spirit (*Gen* 1: 27–28). Pope John Paul II says, “The God of the Covenant has entrusted the life of every individual to his or her fellow human beings, brothers and sisters, according to the law of reciprocity [...] The Spirit becomes the new law which gives strength to believers and awakens in them a responsibility for sharing the gift of self and for accepting others, as a sharing in the boundless love of Jesus Christ himself”.⁴ The Pope explained that this concern is not only reduced to the personal sphere, but must develop socially and make the unconditional respect for human life the foundation of a renewed society. In other words, the civilisation of love means that only divine love, introduced into the world through the Incarnation and Redemption of the Word of God, can establish genuine solidarity between people in fraternal love and respect for dignity. The Church is therefore called to work for cultural reform in the world that will make human lives and societies more humane, and that will establish peace and goodwill at all levels including the personal, social, national and universal.

In view of the great challenges of our times that we briefly mentioned in the introduction, how can women contribute to a civilisation of love and be able to accomplish a mission which is that

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 76.

of the whole Church? According to Church teaching, Our Lady, in whom the definitive Covenant with God was made, offers the men and women of the Church a road map to lead them on the path to reversing the culture of death that entered the heart of man through original sin.

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE FACE OF WOMANHOOD AND THE PATH OF RECONCILIATION

The women of the Gospel who met and knew Jesus Christ show us the importance of meeting God so that women may become aware of the anthropological truth that they are “daughters of Abraham” (*Lk* 13: 16) worthy and able to praise the Lord and serve His Kingdom. The healing of the crippled woman on a Sabbath day, the day of the Lord, is particularly significant. Healed and free once again, the poor lady who had been condemned for eighteen years to be unable to look others in the face, was able to raise her head and look at the sky and praise the God of Israel, God of her ancestors and her people of which she is a genuine member as a daughter of Abraham. This is the title Jesus gave her in front of a community who were shocked by a miracle performed on the Sabbath. This liberating and glorifying gesture was applied to all the women in the Gospel (Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, the woman with a haemorrhage, etc.). It reveals how much a sense of dignity is essential in order to be able to recognise oneself in God. Thus, Christ came into the world to reach out to humanity that had forgotten its truth. He addressed to women the specific word that would reconcile them with their wounded femininity. He invited them to new birth in the Spirit as an act of vocational renewal which recovers the splendour of our origins.

For these women and for all women throughout history, the Mother of God represents a living word that bears witness to fullness of grace and dignity through her union with the person and work of her Son. John Paul II, in commenting on the Letter to the Galatians (4: 4) “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son,

born of woman”, he noted the fact that the Apostle does not call the Mother of Christ by her own name “Mary”, but by “woman”, in order to establish a concordance with woman promised in the book of Genesis (*Gen* 3: 5), which places women at the heart of the salvific event.⁵ The woman, Mary, reached a union with God that exceeds all the expectations of the human spirit. It is her elevation towards Jesus Christ that determines the root purpose of the existence of every human being, and so she became the archetype of all humankind. She represents the humanity of all human beings, men and women. By her response to the Archangel Gabriel “I am the handmaid of the Lord” (*Lk* 1: 38), she joined the messianic service of the One who came to serve and not to be served (*Mk* 10: 45), anticipating by her response to God the true face of Mother Church, servant and missionary. Therefore, the two pillars of human dignity, as represented by the *Theotokos*, have union with God and each other, in love and the free gift of self.

As Mother of the new humanity, Our Lady reawakens us to the originality of human anthropology in general and of women in particular. It is an invitation to revisit the beginnings with new eyes and the light of the gifts of the Redemption, in which man and woman, both created in the image and likeness of God, are called to “dominate” all the earth (*Gen* 1: 28). In Genesis 2: 18–25, woman is created by God from the man’s rib, as another “I”, to show that “man cannot exist alone; he can exist only as a unity of the two”.⁶

It is clear that the imbalance in the male/female relationship, generated by original sin at the instigation of the devil, disturbed the whole system of human relationships which degenerated into the suicidal side-effects of growing rivalry. The liberating word of Christ, through Our Lady’s journey of faith, provides us with the true path to achieve the reconciliation of men and women with God, with their vocation and their male and female identity.

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 3.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 7.

With this approach, women assume a special role that responds to their nature as women. John Paul II made the connection between the fullness of time and fullness of grace conferred on the Woman Mary, and so it would be legitimate, in our times, to see that the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God would remain incomplete as long as women's vocation, as intended by God from all eternity, has not taken its place in the process of building the Kingdom. How can we provide young people with a better understanding of this vocation? It would help them to better prepare for their future, the future of the Church and that of all humanity.

Church teaching invites us all, especially women, to contemplate the Marian way and to draw from it the basic features of our mission. Since Vatican II and the writings of Pope Paul VI that sowed social and cultural renewal, a pastoral and social Mariology began to appear in the ecclesial sphere. We read in his speech at the closing of the third session of the Council in November 1964: "Let each of you venerable brothers undertake to hold high among the Christian people the name and honour of Mary. Point to her as a model of faith and full compliance with every call from God and as the model of full assimilation to the teaching of Christ and of his charity, so that all the faithful gathered in the name of their common Mother, may feel ever firmer in the faith and in adherence to Jesus Christ, and with fervent charity towards all brothers and sisters, fostering love for the poor, attachment to justice and the defence of peace, as the great saint Ambrose exhorted in his time".⁷

The social aspect of Mariology is based, from the scriptural perspective, on Mary's "Visitation" to Elizabeth (*Lk* 1: 46–56), where the Magnificat opens up the new Messianic times that bring freedom and justice to the poor and oppressed.

⁷ PAUL VI, Discorso di chiusura della III Sessione del Concilio Vaticano II, 21 novembre 1964.

A Woman – the Mother of God – is presented as a spokesperson and minister of her Son's salvific plan who proclaims a new social order based on divine charity in which the weak, the sick and the marginalised will be at the centre of the community. God's logic reverses the world's laws for they are built on enmity. Moreover, this was clarified by the Mother of Divine Mercy in Lourdes. She, who was given in advance all the potential conferred on Mother Church, shows us the way to faith both spiritually and socially. The God proclaimed by Mary in the Magnificat is a God who is present in history and is faithful to the promises made. God saves us and acts in justice. God calls the Church and all people of goodwill to take care of the world and to serve the mystery of life against the forces of evil and death. Mary, God's committed servant, is with her Son in taking on the apocalyptic struggle against the "dragon" that seeks to destroy the image of the Creator and the seeds of salvation in the heart of human beings. She is a woman who is consciously aware of being a created person who fully believed in the Word of God with full hope in his victory and fullness of love for her Son and for all the brothers and sisters who are united to Him. Pope Paul VI draws an image of Mary as a prophetic and liberating women: "The modern woman will note with pleasant surprise that Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions".⁸

In the person of Mary, the Church learns how to build a civilisation of love in the transcendence of faith in God that places human beings on a safe and authentic path. Everything begins with an act of faith that says 'yes' to God and his plan for humanity. It is an act that humbly acknowledges that we are created beings called to understand the meaning of our nature to grow and be fulfilled in peace in the

⁸ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, no. 37.

obedience of faith and total trust in God. Mary, by nature, confirms this priority as the source and the starting point. Women and men are asked to recover their anthropological truth as male and female in faith in God the Creator. They are called to conversion which releases the heart of man that has been wounded by his desire to dominate and the heart of the woman blinded by desire (*Gen 3: 16*). This requirement is urgent today. Men and women seem to have lost the compass of their specific identity under the cultural pressure of the century that has blurred the benchmarks and anthropological constants provided by natural law and Revelation.

For Women imbued with the Gospel and also called to take part in the construction of the city of humankind, it is essential to return to basics in order to be equipped with this liberating truth which gives the overall vision and purpose of their commitment. Through the words of Genesis and Mary's journey, God calls women to welcome the gift of motherhood as the fruit of self-giving. Its source and principle is in God, John Paul II tells us in referring to the Scriptures, "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me'. 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you'"⁹ Women, in their likeness to God, do not forget their children, whether grown up or still small, strong or weak, healthy or suffering from disability, intelligent or not very gifted, beautiful or ugly. No matter what others think, this is her child to whom she gave birth, her beloved who is her joy, just as it was for Mary at the foot of the Cross and for the heavenly Father at the Jordan River. Maternal and paternal bonds of love resemble and participate in the freely given love of God which does not place any conditions. The Lord chose for Himself a Mother who could welcome his Incarnation in the total gift of love right to the end, a Mother who remained present at the foot of his cross. With all the strength of her faith, love and hope, she drew together the beloved disciple and the other women with

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 8.

her motherly care as an act of love for her disfigured Son. At the foot of the transforming Cross, Mary's motherhood reached its universal dimensions in Christ, calling all women from every corner of the world to accept the ultimate meaning of their vocation in God by standing by all those who suffer. Mary shows women the deeper meaning of motherhood which she embraces physically and spiritually. This shows a new way where, at the foot of the tree of life, all humanity will come together reconciled in their mutual truths. Here they can build a new city in which the weakest and those who suffer will not be rejected, but will be served like royalty.

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE CIVILISATION OF LOVE, ACCEPTANCE OF LIFE

In contemplating their nature in the light of divine revelation, men and women, aided by grace, can discover their purpose. In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II says: "Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.¹⁰ [...] According to the plan of God, marriage is the foundation of the wider community of the family.¹¹ [...] the family finds in love the source and the constant impetus for welcoming, respecting and promoting each one of its members in his or her lofty dignity as a person".¹²

The expression of love in a couple's union culminates in the extraordinary wonder experienced at the birth of a new life. Couples whose marriage is a real alliance keep this authentic attitude, in spite of social and cultural pressures. In the order of love, life is welcomed as a gift. The new arrival is perceived, from the first moment of conception, as a person worthy of respect and affection.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.* no. 14.

¹² *Ibid.* no. 22.

This reality reaches its climax in Mary. From the first moments of Jesus' existence in the womb of his Mother, the child is welcomed as the Holy One of God, loved and expected. In the house of Zacharias, three days after the Annunciation, he was hailed as Lord, source of joy and messianic blessing. Again, Mary reveals the fullness of her maternal predisposition before the mystery of life. In her womb, Jesus united himself with all the embryos in the world awaiting birth in the dignity of love. A mother who is aware of this mystery is able to join the silent expectations of the innocent who lives within her. As she is endowed by the Creator with all that constitutes the wonder of motherhood, she knows the child before seeing or hearing it. Mary was receptive to the love of God the Father who formed the humanity of his Beloved in the womb of the new Woman. This love that now reveals its specific riches will be transmitted by her to the heart of her husband: "Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. [...] This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings – not only towards her own child, but every human being – which profoundly marks the woman's personality. It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. [...] in many ways he has to learn his own "fatherhood" from the mother".¹³

Mary illustrates the fullness of the feminine vocation when she becomes Mother of Life and Mother of the people of the New Covenant. She reveals to us that motherhood cannot be reduced to the physiological sphere. It is above all an act of heart and mind, for Mary "conceived this Son in her mind before she conceived him in her womb".¹⁴ She was united to him through all-encompassing motherhood that gives birth, accompanies, educates and believes in her child, the Son of God entrusted to her tenderness. Before the

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 18.

¹⁴ IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 13.

greatness of the mystery, a woman is called to further contemplate the sacredness of human life, and to be reconciled with her maternal vocation. This is the great challenge for women today in an individualistic and relativistic culture that overshadows the dignity of their vocation and threatens the future of humanity. It is obvious that women are reconciled with their vocation, *per se*, through their reconciliation with men and with Life. It is a global anthropological process where a 'yes to life' becomes the 'fiat' of our times that is said by women and the Church, to God and all of humanity. In this regard, the words of John Paul II in *Evangelium Vitae* are of singular relevance: "For this to happen, we need first of all to foster, in ourselves and in others, a contemplative outlook. Such an outlook arises from faith in the God of life, who has created every individual as a 'wonder' [...] This outlook does not give in to discouragement when confronted by those who are sick, suffering, outcast or at death's door. Instead, in all these situations it feels challenged to find meaning, and precisely in these circumstances it is open to perceiving in the face of every person a call to encounter, dialogue and solidarity".¹⁵

THE FAMILY, A PILOT SOCIETY FOR A CIVILISATION OF LOVE

The family is the first place where the couple, man and woman, experience their daily three-dimensional reconciliation: with God, with their identities and reciprocal vocations and with life as a gift from God. John Paul II said that "Within the 'people of life and the people for life', the family has a decisive responsibility. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to 'guard, reveal and communicate love'".¹⁶

As a sanctuary of life, the family has a continuing role right to the end: from joyful acceptance of the new-born to the dignified passing

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 83.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 92.

away of the older members surrounded by affection. In an ambiance of sharing and solidarity, the role of the family is crucial as a school of values. The members of the household are spontaneously integrated in the warm relationship that consolidates as the days and years pass, time spent together, united by the same joys, the same sorrows and the same concerns experienced in union and collaboration. The law of love rules in families, especially when parents are aware of their vocation to found a “domestic church, [...] to proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life. [...] By word and example, in the daily round of relations and choices, and through concrete actions and signs, parents lead their children to authentic freedom, actualised in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, cordial openness, dialogue, generous service, solidarity and all the other values which help people to live life as a gift. In raising children Christian parents must be concerned about their children’s faith and help them to fulfil the vocation God has given them”¹⁷.

Let us return then to the way followed by the Mother of God and Saint Joseph. In their full adherence of faith to their vocation, they brought up the Child Jesus while being fully aware that he was the Son of God who came for a specific mission to which they too must adhere. Saint Joseph was attentive to everything that the Lord asked him through the Angel and he was totally responsive to Providence, and at the service of the Child and his Mother. As for Mary, she did not give in to the maternal temptation to possessiveness or human pride that could divert, even for a brief moment, her attention and total union with her Son, for whom she was both Mother and disciple. Whenever Mary appears in the Gospel, she is dedicated to the work of Salvation. Examples are the Wedding at Cana and the Passion. She is present for her Son, she believes in his victory and she is eager to see him manifest his glory to the apostles, disciples and all those around him.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Maternal love, therefore, supports the growth and development of all family members. The mother represents the love of the Heavenly Father attentive to the smallest and weakest by showing them all the love that heals and gives joy. The parable of the lost coin (*Lk* 15: 8–10), the only one where the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a woman, illustrates that truth beautifully.

The educational model provided by the Holy Family, and by Mary in particular, is a light that shows us the priorities in the values that foster the growth of God's children. In this sense, John Paul II deplored the way modern civilisation ignores the value of motherhood: "Part of this daily heroism is also the silent but effective and eloquent witness of all those brave mothers who devote themselves to their own family without reserve, who suffer in giving birth to their children and who are ready to make any effort, to face any sacrifice, in order to pass on to them the best of themselves. In living out their mission these heroic women do not always find support in the world around them. On the contrary, the cultural models frequently promoted and broadcast by the media do not encourage motherhood".¹⁸

FORECAST FOR THE FUTURE

In the construction of the civilisation of love, it seems clear that the family is called to develop its mission. In this regard, Pope John Paul II calls Christian families to open up to love of neighbour and to the social and political sphere, according to a roadmap he proposed for the implementation of a great strategy in the service of life.¹⁹ Similarly, John Paul II exhorted the Church to renew the culture of life in Christian communities themselves, to engage in serious debate with everyone, including with non-believers, and so move towards a change in our culture. The proposed approach, according to a summary

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 86.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, nos. 95–99.

of its proposals, is based on the formation of moral conscience, on education and on social and cultural activity.

1. THE FORMATION OF MORAL CONSCIENCE

A moral conscience should be formed for the following:

For the anthropological discovery of the human vocation, that of women and men, which transforms their relationship of domination and competition to harmonious acceptance and self-giving in reciprocity.

To discover that the comprehensive and authentic sense of motherhood in its spiritual dimensions is a vocation from God to bring his life and love into the world.

To discover the immeasurable and inviolable value of every human life and the inseparable connection between life and freedom as two realities that have the same reference point: the vocation to love.

To the conscious recognition by human beings of their condition as creatures who receive their being and life from God as a gift and as a task.

To discover the defining mission of the family in the construction of humanity and socio-cultural reality based on human dignity. The family is a natural school that initiates solidarity, dialogue, acceptance of others and peace.

To rediscover the necessary link that unites freedom and truth. When the link is broken, this impedes the establishment of rights on a firm rational basis and opens the way to totalitarianism in public authorities.

2. EDUCATION

This should be action that does the following:

It helps human beings to achieve their full humanity in a growing respect for life. This prepares them to treat other people fairly.

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It begins with orientation on a personal level because we cannot build a true culture of life without helping young people to understand and experience their sexuality. The trivialisation of sexuality is among the main factors at the source of contempt for life. Education includes teaching about chastity that can foster maturity of the person in respect for the spousal meaning of the body.

It guides married couples in responsible parenthood and teaches them respect for the dignity of life.

It considers suffering and death to be basic aspects of the human experience.

It stimulates courage in young people to undertake a new way of life by adopting a fair range of values for concrete choices at personal, family, social and international levels.

It fosters the birth of a new feminism free from ambiguity and reactionary excesses that marked some feminist streams in the second half of the twentieth century and that then introduced into our schools the so-called gender theory that claims that differences between the sexes are strictly cultural.

3. SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

Social and cultural action should do the following:

Constantly proclaim the anthropological truth about humanity as persons created in the image of God.

Demystify democracy which is a means rather than an end in the service of human dignity.

Counter ethical relativism which characterises much of contemporary culture and is considered, wrongly, as a source of tolerance that ensures adherence to the decisions of the majority. It should know that the value of democracy stands where the dignity of every human person is respected with their intangible and inalienable rights, and recognise the common good as the end and criterion regulating political life.

Recognise the existence of an objective moral law which, as a natural law written on the heart of human beings, is a normative reference for civil law itself.

Work towards a legal system that respects human dignity and the family mission in society, through the laws that protect life and family values as factors that are essential for stability and social prosperity.

Reconcile, through practical measures, the fundamental vocation of women as mothers and educators, and working conditions that allow them to live both dimensions as mothers and citizens.

Recognise the importance of the home as a place to bloom and grow in humanity.

Recognise the moral and material value of women's work when they choose to serve in the family home as an invaluable source of social stability that is despised in the current culture.

Create support structures and support for women and families in need.

These are some important points selected from the writings of Pope John Paul II that show the way to build a civilisation of love. This civilisation has its roots in the Heart of God who has entrusted it, in a special way, to the hearts of women, to the generosity of their maternal vocation, rooted in their psycho-physiological and spiritual reality. In this sense, women are called to contemplate the Work and the Word of God, fulfilled in the person and the journey of the Mother of God, who embodied all the womanly graces for her eminent role as Mother of God and of the new humanity. She is the Mother who accepted, in the Spirit, the full meaning of human and spiritual motherhood, the Woman who served God's person and plan for the salvation of the world. She is a living word addressed by God to women. May the Mariologists help us more to discover the pastoral and social impact that emanates from the splendour of the Handmaiden of the Lord. More than ever, the world needs beauty and goodness, and love that gives life and grows in God, the love that discerns and that campaigns against the forces of darkness that bring division and death. Far from regarding the *Theotokos* as a static

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model, she inspires and accompanies, through her maternal instinct, so many transformative social works.

We implore her to come, and in all her tenderness, to help our women and our families, so that there may be real reconciliation that will sow peace in our world that is torn apart by so many conflicts, a peace that is the ultimate fruit of the civilisation of love.

II. PANEL DISCUSSION

II.1. The many faces of today's cultural crisis: new challenges and how they relate to women's calling

How should we appraise the sexual revolution? *

LUCETTA SCARAFFIA **

The sexual revolution – one of the many cultural revolutions that changed modern society and is perhaps one of the most important – is now established in Western societies and has been for the past thirty years at least. Now it is spreading to the rest of the world. We can therefore try to make an initial assessment of this phase in history, one that has certainly been instrumental in the growth of secularisation.

Its connection with feminism is obvious. The sexual revolution is the culminating point in the process of the full homogenisation of women and men, because to say that women are equal to men in sexual life means to challenge the reality of an evident biological difference. In order to achieve this aim and to bring about complete equality between women and men in this area, what was needed to be done – and was done – was to cancel motherhood, because the big difference between men and women is motherhood. Motherhood has always prevented women from having the same sexual freedom as men. Men could not conceive, but women could, so sexual freedom could be experienced by men but not by women.

Now the sexual revolution has made a great breakthrough in the relationship between men and women, an unprecedented breakthrough. This change came about because of a theoretical and cultural battle, and also because of a medical breakthrough that took

* Transcribed from the recorded speech, given in Italian, and reviewed by the speaker.

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place at the end of the nineteen-fifties. That was when Dr. Pincus discovered the birth control pill which allowed women to separate procreation and sexuality and to decide themselves whether to have children or not. This discovery brought about a total revolution in the relationship between men and women because now there was a new possibility open to women: that of experiencing sexuality as a game and no longer as a responsibility. Sexuality, if separated from procreation, can become something superficial and playful ... and this has allowed the main objective of the sexual revolution to be achieved: to remove responsibility from pleasure. However, it happened that, a few decades later, AIDS arrived, and this meant that the game could also become very dangerous. In the early years of the sexual revolution, when AIDS was not yet known, it was thought that sexuality, thanks to the birth control pill, could really become simply a playful activity freed from rules, freed from relationships and freed from all that used to humanise it in a certain sense, and that confined it, obviously. We must emphasise that the spread of the contraceptive pill has been fundamental in concretely bringing about the sexual revolution. Without the pill, no one could have actually implemented this revolution which had already been advocated, at least since the late nineteenth century, by some intellectuals. Remember that Freud, to put it briefly, attributed to sexual repression a whole series of mental disorders and neuroses, and therefore essentially argued that, if there had been no sexual repression, there would not have been these neuroses. He wrote his books in the early years of the twentieth century. The cultural tools to justify the sexual revolution were drawn up between the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The first to speak of free love were eugenicists. They were in favour of sexual freedom but not to freedom of procreation. It was to be subject to strict medical control. They were followed by psychoanalysts like Freud and his student Reich who took the insights of his teacher to the extreme.

He claimed that sexual repression was at the root of all forms of aggression, and therefore of war. Anthropologists also contributed.

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They claimed that in primitive tribes and the primitive populations that they were studying, there were no sexual rules and therefore sexual sex life took place in complete freedom and naturalness. Consequently, they were all very happy and had no complexes. They had no need for psychologists. Of course, it then turned out to be untrue. It was simply that these people had established rules that are very different from ours and anthropologists had not observed them. It seemed to them that everything was allowed. Of course, when they studied the issue further, they realised that they had got it wrong, as they were also wrong to put the blame for all mental illnesses on sexual repression. However, the scientific justification of sexual freedom is founded on these cultural blunders, and then, thanks to the pill, it could really be achieved.

The sexual revolution immediately appeared to be a form of women's liberation because it allowed them to experience sexuality as men did, without the constant worry about pregnancy. Motherhood could be the source of great happiness, but it could also cause fear and anguish. The majority of women accepted this with great enthusiasm. They believed that the sexual revolution gave them liberation, and they joined in large numbers in this project that was being touted through forms of utopian thinking. This explains why many women distanced themselves from the Church in the second half of the twentieth century.

Indeed, supporters of the sexual revolution skilfully launched certain utopian promises that made its fortune. The first of these said that sexual freedom would give happiness to humans, and that humans were mentally ill because they were sexually repressed and for that reason they were unhappy. Doctors and philosophers promised that sexual freedom would bring happiness to human beings.

They said that sexual freedom would lead to the disappearance of prostitution, another case of wishful thinking, one of the major issues that had already been part of the socialist utopian ideologies. Marx had in fact said that socialism would abolish prostitution. The prophets of the sexual revolution also said that it would abolish prostitution,

because prostitution was only the sick face, the sign of an erroneous relationship between women and men who were constrained by rules that are too strict.

The other utopian idea that brought about the sexual revolution was that of the wanted child. This is the promise that, by using birth control, you could have children only when you are ready to become parents, ready financially and ready psychologically. These wanted children would be better brought up and would become much better than the children who were born when the sex life of a couple normally produced children. There was strong propaganda of this type that, moreover, took root even in environments that were not in favour of sexual promiscuity. The hope that society would be improved through the birth of wanted children made inroads in the hearts of many people. This was probably a stronger utopian engine than the sexual revolution.

These utopian ideas were all attractive: that of happiness was attractive to everyone; that of the end of prostitution touched women especially, because women prostitutes are still – although there is a large number, as you know, of male prostitutes – seventy to eighty percent of those in prostitution. The ‘wanted child’ possibility allowed women to determine whether they wanted to have a career, when to have a child, and so to decide the timing in their lives that until then had been out of their control. Well, at least they thought they could do it.

Now, after fifty years of this ‘great promise’ with a current of thought that has really found adhesions everywhere, it is still impossible to speak out critically about the sexual revolution. If you dare mention that perhaps it did not go as well as could be hoped, you are attacked. They all claim that, in any case, freedom from taboos has improved the lives of all. There was, and still is, the pressure of the ‘politically correct’ in favour of the sexual revolution. It is really very strong, even if today, fifty years later, we can say that none of the promised utopias actually materialised. We know, of course, that utopia never happens. Nobody became happier with sexual freedom. In fact, perhaps they grew lonelier and unhappier. This paradise of sexual intercourse

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certainly did not reach everyone, but only some. Moreover, it was not necessarily a real paradise. Prostitution has increased very much, as you know. These wanted children have not changed society for the better. In fact, there are some very interesting studies, including a very good one by Gauchet, *L'enfant du désir*, that explains how these wanted children – from whom so much was expected, who are educated in a non-spontaneous and unnatural way because they must be continually reaffirmed and reminded that they are wanted – grow up to be insecure adults. They have many more difficulties than those born, so to speak, by chance. Perhaps they have made society even worse. It can be said that all the evidence is there. Just as the abortion law did not eliminate abortion, although it decreased somewhat because of contraceptives, it has not, for example, eliminated abortion among very young girls. What has happened is that sexual relations are starting at an earlier age and therefore also the age for abortions.

It is not possible to make an assessment of the sexual revolution. It would be an interesting thing to do because, as always, when change and transformation are proposed, the discourse is full of wishful thinking. Does it make any sense for us, fifty years later, to still believe in Utopia and not to look around to see if these utopian dreams have been achieved? This is something that we should do.

There are two things that the sexual revolution has achieved, though, and these we must recognise. The first is that single mothers are no longer condemned to disgrace and social exclusion. This is very important. The second is that recognition has been given to feminine desire and a woman's wishes with regard to a sexual relationship. This did not happen before, and now it makes it possible to condemn sexual violence. We know that sexual violence by men against women has always been there. However, in the past – here I am not referring so much to awful violence as to, let us say, a domineering attitude that ignores the woman's wishes – it was largely considered to be one of the normal aspects of life. This is no longer the case today. Today men have no right to be violent to their wives. This shift with regard

to sexual violence certainly stems from recognition of women's wishes and of their full rights over their own bodies.

I would like to add a reflection on two things that I have just mentioned concerning single mothers being marginalised and falling into disgrace and women being raped. Nowadays they finally have laws that recognise their situation and that are defended by public opinion. These are two positive results of the sexual revolution that we Catholics could have brought about ourselves, without any need for the sexual revolution. Why did we Catholic women and the Church never show concern for those women who were suffering? I know that there were shelters for single mothers, but far fewer for raped women. Now there are also many shelters for women who have suffered abuse. Yet it is not only a question of protection and assistance. It is also a question of respect, defence of a right to be treated with respect, something that was often missing.

In "Women, Church, World", the women's monthly section in *L'Osservatore Romano*, we dedicated an issue to violence against women and we talked about these anti-violence centres, now also present in the Catholic world. There are many parish priests who refer these women, including married women raped by their husbands, to these centres. It is a significant innovation. In the past, before feminism, this was not the case. Even when those suffering women lived in the peripheries of pain, nobody did anything about it. It is one thing to help them, and it is another thing, from the cultural point of view, to rehabilitate them. The Church must develop unconventional cultural forms as was *Mulieris Dignitatem* to help women. However, this is something that has always been underestimated in the history of the Church because women counted for little. It should have been Catholic women like us who undertook to rehabilitate the image of single mothers. We should have denounced and changed our culture's image of women who suffered violence.

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I think that if we had paid greater attention to the dignity of women it would have changed the attitude of lay women and feminists toward the church. I think that, although feminists are so critical of the Church and say that the Church oppresses women, among their many false accusations, some of what they say is right.

The identity crisis of men and women in the context of gender ideology

ÁNGELA APARISI MIRALLES*

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to adequately address the issue of the identity crisis of men and women, in the context of what is usually called “gender ideology”, I consider it important to describe the context in which they are currently carrying out this discussion. The first aspect to consider is the very meaning of the word ‘gender’. Clearly, in recent years, the term sex has been progressively replaced by gender. This is not only in social discourse, but also in the scientific, political, legislative, academic and other fields. Can we consider them to be synonymous concepts?

The word ‘gender’ is used nowadays with very different meanings and in very different contexts. In the strictly scientific area, it is generally understood that the notion of gender is a category of social analysis that explores the roles that men and women have played throughout history. According to this meaning, while sex would be a biological and objective fact, gender would point to the cultural and changing factor, a characteristic of humans and a consequence of their liberty.¹

In this particular context, the use of the gender category allows us, among other things, to make visible the differential and discriminatory

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¹ Cf. A. APARISI, “*Persona y género: ideología y realidad*”, in: IDEM. (coord.), *Persona y Género*, Cizur Menor 2011.

situation that women often suffered throughout history, and still suffer today. Therefore, it is in principle a useful and legitimate notion in cultural and philosophical anthropology, as well as in legal language. In short, it is a scientific breakthrough that allows a previously hidden situation to be made visible.

From this perspective, the use of the gender category allows us to distinguish at least three models of man–woman relationship that have crystallised over time: the model of subordination, the egalitarian model and the model of reciprocity and complementarity.²

2. MODELS OF SEX–GENDER RELATIONSHIP

The subordination model is characterised, in very general terms, by social inequality, sometimes legislated, between men and women. It is based on an anthropological presupposition that identifies sexual difference with inferiority and subordination. Or, put another way, it considers women to be different and therefore inferior and so they should be subordinate to men. Moreover, it understands that biological sex determines irrevocably from birth the gender of each person, and hence the functions or roles to be played in society by the sole fact of being born male or female.

Therefore, this model, which is also called patriarchal, is at the root of the discrimination that women have suffered throughout history. In short, it is biological determinism that has no basis in reality.

In order to overcome this situation and to challenge the subordination model, the egalitarian model arose over time.

² Cf. M. ELOSEGUI, “*Tres diversos modelos filosóficos sobre la relación entre sexo y género*”, in: A. APARISI (coord.), *Persona y Género*, op. cit.

As it is well known, one of its main precursors was Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986)³, with her book *The Second Sex* (1949).⁴

Since its inception, this second model has contributed to the attainment of greater equality between men and women. Among its achievements we can include the acquisition of voting rights and greater equity in the areas of family, politics, workplace, law, economics, etc. Therefore, its perennial value lies in the courageous defence of equal rights between men and women.

However, in their struggle for equality, some of its currents of thought deny any difference between male and female. They even accuse those who admit that there are original distinctive elements between them of being “essentialists” (defenders of “essences” or “immutable natures”).

These currents, in accordance with their perspective until now, reject the existence of any relationship between sex (biology) and gender (social role). According to their representatives, the existing

³ According to Elósegui, the two “paradigmatic representatives of the women’s liberation movement were Simone de Beauvoir, with her now considered classic of feminism, *The Second Sex*, and later Betty Friedan who published *The Feminine Mystique*. In this way the US and France became the cradles of radical feminism. In Europe it is inspired by Marxism, while in the US it is so only in part, and in this case it is more critical”. He adds, with regard to feminism in the United States, “within the women’s liberation movement that emerged in the 1960’s in that country, we must distinguish between three feminist currents: radical feminism, socialist feminism and liberal feminism” (M. ELÓSEGUI, *Diez temas de género*, Madrid 2002, 31).

⁴ S. DE BEAUVOIR, *The Second Sex (Le deuxième sexe*, 1949), London 1997. In this work, Beauvoir made her famous statement “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. It was in this way, possibly without imagining the consequences of these words, that Simone laid the foundations for a new way of thinking about human sexual identity in which, as we shall see, sex and gender came to be understood as independent spheres (Cf. A.M. GONZÁLEZ, “Gender Identities in a Globalized World”, in: A.M. GONZÁLEZ & V.J. SEIDLER, *Gender Identities in a Globalized World*, New York 2008, 17); See also: M. MIRANDA, *Simone de Beauvoir*, in: A. APARISI (coord.), *Persona y género*, op. cit.

differences between men and women are due exclusively to the weight of education and a patriarchal culture. Such differences must be detected and completely eradicated in order to achieve real equality in a society.

Moreover, this second model fails to overcome the old fallacy whereby difference, inferiority and subordination (of women) are inextricably linked. Instead of going to the root of the problem, it proposes as an alternative to deny any relevance to the biological differences between men and women. Rather than correct a mistaken interpretation of biology, psychology and human experience, it opts for another route and directly rejects any differences based on sexual duality. Therefore it becomes egalitarianism that is completely oblivious to reality.

In short, the egalitarian model, by annulling the specificity of male and female, their characteristic identity and originality, again turns its back on the truth of the human being and so becomes counterproductive. This is seen especially in the current of thought that some have called post-feminism gender or “gender ideology”.

3. POST-FEMINISM GENDER OR “GENDER IDEOLOGY”

These definitions are often used to designate a discourse that radicalises the egalitarian model. In recent decades, this discourse has had considerable influence on the social, academic, political and legislative levels.

Postfeminism gender was clearly demonstrated to public opinion at the Conferences of Cairo (1994) and Beijing (1995). Since then, their theories have profoundly influenced international organisations, especially the UN. For example, although Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the notion of family as a natural society founded on marriage between a man and a woman, now that agency is promoting, at many different levels, some principles of postfeminism gender contrary to this view.

This perspective has also very clearly influenced the policies of some of its institutions, such as INSTRAW⁵ and CEDAW.⁶

This new ideology is the result of the confluence of different currents of thought which emphasise partial data from other sciences. We could highlight from among these the contributions of Sartre's existentialism especially by way of Simone de Beauvoir, the pansexualism of the Freudian left, Marxism, more specifically that of Engels,⁷ the nature/nurture debate that developed in the area of cultural anthropology and on which the dispute between sex and gender rests, evolutionism which inspired the cyborg theory, Derrida and Foucault's deconstructionism, and the criticism of all established authority which was typical of May 1968. This discourse has now evolved towards the so-called queer theory.⁸

We can very briefly point to some features of the so-called "gender ideology":

a) Following on from what has already been observed, we can note a denial of any original difference between man and woman. The

⁵ In 1975, the First World Conference on Women recommended the creation of a research institute to promote women's advancement. The following year, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) created the International Institute for Research and Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW). In 1979, the Council recommended that the UN-INSTRAW have its headquarters in a developing country. In 1983 the official headquarters of UN-INSTRAW was established in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic).

⁶ The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was established under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). Furthermore, on 2 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly approved the creation of a new entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women – UN Women. This body is the result of the merger of four agencies and offices of the world body: the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

⁷ Engels showed himself to be opposed to family (Cf. F. ENGELS, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Chicago 1902).

⁸ The word "queer" was used for some time as a euphemism for homosexual.

richness of sexual duality is rejected, and any identity or specificity based on the fact of being male or female is diluted.

It falls back into the fallacy of linking the categories of difference, inferiority and subordination of women. Therefore, as the main evidence of difference between man and woman comes through biology, then the logic is for major efforts to be made to deprive of any relevance the distinctions that may have a biological origin. It is understood in this way that social roles and the male–female duality itself are a product of culture. They are simply products of patriarchal culture and hence must be eliminated.

In this context, it is argued that the human being is born “neutral” from the point of view of their sexual identity, since this is purely a cultural creation. It is only from our autonomy, and in accordance with the principle of the free development of personality, that we can choose a gender identity. This is independent of biological sex and therefore “self–constructed”.⁹

b) Secondly, as a result of the above, a complete separation between the concepts of sex (biology) and gender (culture) occurs. As we have seen, sex, understood as a mere biological fact, is considered to be absolutely irrelevant to the identity and development of the human personality. In opposition to the traditional model of heterosexuality, they propose a multiplication of genders that are socially and individually constructed. Those recognised so far are: female heterosexual, male heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and pansexual.

In this context, there is also an attempt to overcome the dualism between natural/ unnatural in the exercise of human sexuality by abolishing what are considered taboos of Judeo–Christian origin, such as incest, paedophilia and bestiality, etc.

c) A third assertion is that “the personal is political”. To put it another way, in order to achieve a society according to this model, the

⁹ Cf. A. APARISI, “*Ideología de género: de la naturaleza a la cultura*”, in: *Persona y Derecho*, no. 61, 2009, 169–193.

active intervention of politics and law is required. In this context, they claim social and legal recognition for so-called “new human rights”. These include sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of gender identity.

The first of these rights are those that will allow women to override the principal effect of their biological difference from men: the ability to be mothers. Indeed, motherhood is considered to be at the root of all historical discrimination against women.¹⁰ For this reason, new sexual and reproductive rights are intended to give women full freedom in birth control. Thus, contraceptives¹¹ come to be regarded as the key to equality, and abortion is claimed as a basic human right.¹² So-called “reproductive health” consists primarily in the free disposal of means and mechanisms of any kind in order to avoid reproduction.

d) Finally, in this context we find strong criticism of the traditional heterosexual family. Heterosexuality is called, ironically, ‘veterosexuality’. The requirement for male–female sexual diversity is cancelled and, instead, a plurality of models and options are proposed. In this way the very concept of marriage is diluted and, consequently, also the reasons why the law should recognise and protect it.

Currently, this line of thought defends not only the absolute irrelevance of and indifference to biological sex, but also that of gender. In this way they hold a notion of sexual identity that is “deconstructible” and “reconstructable”.

¹⁰ It is very interesting to note that Simone de Beauvoir held a profoundly negative view of motherhood. On this subject we refer to the work of Professor M. MIRANDA “*El igualitarismo de Simone de Beauvoir: consecuencias prácticas*” in: A. APARISI, *Persona y Género*, op. cit.

¹¹ Above all, it would enhance the use of the erroneously called “emergency contraceptives” which include, *inter alia*, the so-called “morning after pill”.

¹² As Castilla notes, nowadays, when an appeal is made for the rights of women, it frequently refers mainly to an alleged “right to abortion”. In fact, the priority right of women, and also of men, is that which allows them to be mother and father (B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “*Trabajo, paternidad y maternidad en el tercer milenio*”, in: J.A. GALLEGO and J. PÉREZ ADÁN, *Pensar la familia*, Madrid, 2001, 302–303).

This leads to the so-called queer theory whose most prominent representatives are Judith Butler,¹³ Jane Flax¹⁴ and Donna Haraway.¹⁵

4. PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

In order to counter the patriarchal model and gender ideology, we can see the need to develop a third model to better respond to reality and human experience. This model has been called reciprocity, complementarity or male–female shared responsibility.

This proposal is on the line followed by John Paul II which is based on respect for the dignity and human rights of men and women. In very general terms, this model seeks to merge in an appropriate way the categories of sameness and difference between them. It starts, first of all, by studying these from various perspectives. Efforts are made to avoid the mistakes of both the subordinationist model and egalitarianism. Both are excesses that have influenced those who have tipped the scales to the side of difference or, conversely, of sameness.¹⁶

This presupposes, in very general terms, that men and women are different but, at the same time, equal.

¹³ J. BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London 1990, 6. This work has been criticised in some circles by even more radical extremists because it is not totally separated from the biological dimension. However, it can be considered to be one of the most representative works on gender ideology.

¹⁴ J. FLAX, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, University of California Press 1990, 32ff.

¹⁵ D. HARAWAY, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist–Feminism in the Late Century”, in: *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, New York 1991; IDEM., *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the Word of Modern Science*, New York–London 1989.

¹⁶ Cf. B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “Lo masculino y lo femenino en el siglo XXI”, in: A. APARISI and J. BALLESTEROS (ed.), *Por un feminismo de la complementariedad. Nuevas perspectivas para la familia y el trabajo*, Pamplona 2002, 24. See also: B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “La complementariedad varón–mujer. Nuevas hipótesis”, in: *Documentos del Instituto de Ciencias para la Familia*, Madrid 1996².

They are different, for example, at the genetic, endocrinological and even psychological levels. Nevertheless, such differences do not compromise ontological identity in that men and women are people and, therefore, have the same ontological dignity.¹⁷ Therefore, distinction necessarily presupposes equality.¹⁸

Parity between men and women is an unquestionable presupposition. Indeed, such equality is an essential condition for complementarity itself. Both male and female are part of the same nature and have a joint mission: family and culture. In fact, psychological studies have shown that gender similarities far outweigh the differences in any kind of variable.¹⁹

Once equality is properly established, the complementarity model should progress further. It must clarify where the difference is and know how it can be inserted in equality so that neither category harms or replaces the other. This would be to find what Janne Haaland Matlary called the “missing link” of feminism which is “a kind of anthropology that can explain how and in what women are different from men”.²⁰

Moreover, in determining what the difference consists of, it will have to identify what is cultural and what is permanent in the sexual condition, and explain how equality and diversity are harmonised.²¹

¹⁷ As John Paul II pointed out, “The biblical text provides sufficient bases for recognising the essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity. From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them. The woman is another ‘I’ in a common humanity” (JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6).

¹⁸ B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “*Lo masculino y lo femenino en el siglo XXI*”, in: A. APARISI AND J. BALLESTEROS (ed.), *Por un feminismo de la complementariedad. Nuevas perspectivas para la familia y el trabajo*, op. cit. 45.

¹⁹ Cf. E.E. MACCOBY, “*La psicología de los sexos: implicaciones para los roles adultos*”, in: E. SULLEROT (ed.), *Le fait féminin*, Paris 1978.

²⁰ J. HAALAND MATLARY, *El tiempo de las mujeres. Notas para un Nuevo Feminismo*, Madrid 2000, 23.

²¹ B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, *La complementariedad varón-mujer. Nuevas hipótesis*, op. cit., 37–38. As highlighted by the author, until recently it seemed that the

4.1. THE PRESUPPOSITION OF ONTOLOGICAL EQUALITY

As we have said, any difference between men and women necessarily presupposes equality. Both are people and therefore they have the same ontological status. For this reason, men and women are called to be the prime movers in progress, the kind that is balanced and fair and that fosters harmony and happiness. This would be the proper interpretation of *Genesis* 1: 26–31 when, after being blessed by God, the man and the woman are both assigned a double and complementary mission: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it”.

Starting with the principle of equality, we can look at two structural elements that are common to men and women:

a) The intrinsic dignity of human beings

As is well known, the principle of human dignity implies that every human being, male or female, possesses ontological excellence or eminence, superiority in their being with respect to the rest of creation.²² We could say that both are placed in a different order of being. They are not simply animals of a higher species, but belong to another order that is more eminent or excellent, because of which they deserve to be considered persons.²³

basis of complementarity was to be found in difference. It was not sufficiently taken into account that equality is also an essential condition for complementarity.

²² The reference to the principle of human dignity was a constant in the thinking of John Paul II. In his words: “The dignity of the human person is a transcendent value, always recognized as such by those who sincerely search for the truth. Indeed, the whole of human history should be interpreted in the light of this certainty. Every person, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen* 1:26–28) and therefore radically oriented towards the Creator, is constantly in relationship with those possessed of the same dignity. To promote the good of the individual is thus to serve the common good” (Papal Message for World Day of Peace 1999). Similarly, the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* maintains that “society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person’s life” (no. 81).

²³ J. HERVADA, “*Los derechos inherentes a la dignidad de la persona humana*”, in:

From this perspective, we presuppose the existence of a human nature that is common to men and women. This is the essential basis for the recognition of equal human rights. In this sense, Spaemann points out that human rights “should be recognised for all beings descended from humankind and from the first moment of their natural existence, without it being lawful to add any additional criteria”.²⁴

b) The relational nature of men and women.

The second structural element, one that supports equality, is that men and women are relational beings. The dimension of interdependence is also inseparable from the person. This is constructed *in* and *through* interrelationship. Human experience for both men and women is thus an experience of relationship with others.

In reality, a human being is a *being with* others. A person is by nature maximum communication. This does not mean that their personhood derives or depends on their interrelationship (ultimately reducing the person to relationship)²⁵. Neither does it assume that sociability is the result of subsequent human convention, dependent on a historical or cultural context. Certainly this constitutive feature manifests itself later, but the relational structure is rooted in the *being* of the person. That is why, according to Polo, personal being is incompatible with monism.

Humana Iura, 1 (1991), 361–362.

²⁴ R. SPAEMANN, *Essays in Anthropology: Variations on a Theme*, Eugene US 2010, 49–72.

²⁵ It is well known that Mounier conceived personhood to be a vital link between the “I” and the “you”. This understanding was taken further by E. Husserl and M. Scheler – with the methods of phenomenology–, and also F. Ebner, M. Buber, R. Guardini and others, through the rediscovery of experience (See CH. SCHÜTZ and R. SARACH, “*El hombre como persona*”, in: VV.AA., *Mysterium Salutis*, Einsiedeln 1965).

He declared that “one person all alone would be an absolute tragedy”,²⁶ because a person has the capacity to give him/herself²⁷ and the gift needs someone to receive it.²⁸ This *being-accompanied*, which is what a person is, is described, since Heidegger, by the term *being-with*. A person is not only being, but is *being-with*, or as Polo called it, *coexistence*.

Moreover, we should note that the awareness that everyone has of themselves is linked to their awareness of the other. Relationship with the world is intrinsic to the structure of being and, therefore, identity is defined by its relationship to otherness. From a psychological perspective, it can be said that the “measure of ‘myself’ is given to me by ‘another self’, a ‘self’ that I recognise in the ‘you’ . Identity and otherness claim each other”.²⁹

4.2. SOME HYPOTHESES ABOUT DIFFERENCE

With the ontological equality between man and woman as our basis, the problem is now, as already noted, to clarify the status of difference and join it together with equality. In principle, it is considered that the distinction or difference between male and female affects the deepest identity of a person. In contrast to dualistic thinking, its basis is the radical unity between body and spirit, between the corporeal and the rational dimension. Hence, personal uniqueness must accommodate, as a fundamental element, one’s body and sex and ultimately the

²⁶ L. POLO, “*La coexistencia del hombre*”, in: *Actas de las XXV Reuniones Filosóficas* de la Facultad de Filosofía de la Universidad de Navarra, Tomo I, Pamplona 1991, 33–48.

²⁷ Cf. IDEM, “*Tener y dar*”, in: *Estudios sobre la Encíclica ‘Laborem exercens’*, BAC, Madrid 1897, 222–230.

²⁸ Indeed, as Polo pointed out, the fundamental problem for love is to connect, because, speaking in absolute terms, without being able to connect love cannot exist (cf. *Ibid.*, 228).

²⁹ Cf. G. ZUANAZZI, *L’età ambigua. Paradossi, risorse e turbamenti dell’adolescenza*, Brescia 1995, 55; IDEM, *Tema e simboli dell’eros*, Roma 1991, 1ff.

fact of being male or female. As noted by John Paul II, “The role of sex, which in a sense is ‘constitutive of the person’ (not only an attribute of a person’), proves how deeply human beings with all their spiritual solitude, with their own uniqueness and distinctiveness, are constituted by the body as ‘he’ or ‘she’”.³⁰

Human sexual difference would then be a distinction in the inner self. Considering that the human being is personal, it would be a difference in the very core of the person. Thus, there would be two forms or possible “crystallisations” of the personal being: the male person and the female person.

Feuerbach said in this regard: “But flesh and blood is nothing without the oxygen of sexual distinction. The distinction of sex is not superficial, or limited to certain parts of the body; it is an essential one: it penetrates bones and marrow. The substance of man is manhood; that of woman, womanhood. However spiritual and supersensual the man may be, he remains always a man; and it is the same with the woman. Hence personality is nothing without distinction of sex; personality is essentially distinguished into masculine and feminine”.³¹

The difference between men and women is currently supported by the biomedical sciences, specifically by genetics,³² endocrinology and neurology. Clearly, from a biological point of view, a person exists as male or female. A human being, naturally and innately, is differentiated while developing a male or female human body. The gametes brought by the organism of a male and of a female to fertilisation are clearly different. The X or Y chromosome of the male gamete determines

³⁰ JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 21 November 1979.

³¹ L. FEUERBACH, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 1843, English translation: *The Essence of Christianity*, Part 1, chap. 9. (<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/ec09.htm>). He also said: “Where there is no thou, there is no I; but the distinction between I and thou, the fundamental condition of all personality, of all consciousness, is only real, living, ardent, when felt as the distinction between man and woman. The thou between man and woman has quite another sound than the monotonous thou between friends” (*Ibid.*).

³² Cf. M. CAMPS, *Identidad sexual y Derecho*, Pamplona 2007, 41ff.

the chromosomal sex of the new individual, as the female always has the sex chromosome X. In turn, the chromosomal sex determines the gonadal sex and it the hormonal, with all its important consequences later. Therefore, the sexual condition of the human person is a feature that, at least from the biological standpoint, accompanies human beings from their very origin and throughout their existence.³³

From a genetic point of view, all of a man's cells (containing the XY chromosomes) are different from those of women (whose equivalent is XX). The difference between an XX and XY cell is calculated to be around three percent of their genetic heritage. It is not a very high percentage. However, we must keep in mind that this small difference is found in every cell of our body. In fact, right up to the very last cell of the male body is male and that of the female is female.³⁴ That has at least two consequences: that we are more alike than different, and we are the same and different in everything. The aforementioned biological reality involves, in itself, a deep personal meaning. Spaemann called the biological dimension of a person the "basic natural identity". This natural dimension the body, allows a human being to be "at all times identifiable from the outside".³⁵ This is a crucial clue: personal physical identity, sexual identity and family identities and relationships that emerge from that reality maternity, paternity, filiation and fraternity are embodied in an organism, and radically mark the life of a person. Consequently, sexual condition is not an irrelevant element but an unavoidable premise in a personal path of forming one's identity.

³³ Grumbach and Conte state that the distinction between male and female is "scientifically absolute" to the point where these terms are used to refer to two opposites. See: M. GRUMBACH and F. CONTE, "Disorders of Sex Differentiation", in: WILSON, FOSTER, KRONENBERG and LARSEN, *Williams Textbook of Endocrinology*, Philadelphia 1998, 1303–1425. However, this statement does not imply that male and female sexual identity are two disjointed realities, but rather are relational.

³⁴ Cfr. R. BLAY, *Iron John*, London 1990.

³⁵ Cfr. R. SPAEMANN, *Persons: The Difference between "Someone" and "Something"*, Oxford 2006. See also: M. CAMPS *Identidad sexual y Derecho*, op. cit., 241ff.

The proper development of the Y chromosome will determine, in turn, endocrinological differences that will add to the genetic differentiation. The fetus, unlike what is claimed by all the classical doctrines, is programmed to become feminine in the absence of the Y chromosome. The action of hormones is very important in the subsequent intra- and extrauterine growth of human beings.

Hormones determine sexed development and have an affect on the central nervous system. Consequently they also differentially configure the brain.³⁶ To Zuanazzi, “sexualisation involves the whole body, so that dimorphism implicates, more or less obviously, all organs and functions. In particular, this process affects the central nervous system, determining structural and functional differences between the male and female brain”.³⁷ Thus, it can be said that both brains would be “fundamental biological variants of the human brain”.³⁸

Feuerbach anticipated today’s scientific research when he maintained that the brain is determined by sexuality. Feelings and

³⁶ There is ample literature on this subject. See: G.J. DE VRIES, J.P.C. DEBRUIN, H.B.M. UYLINGS, and M.A. CORNER, (eds.), “Sex differences in the brain: the relation between structure and function”, in: *Progress in Brain Research*, vol. 61, Amsterdam 1984; A. MOIR and D. JESSEL, *Brain Sex. The real difference between men and women*, London 1989; D. KIMURA, “Cerebro de varón y cerebro de mujer”, in: *Investigación y ciencia*, Nov. 1992, 77–84; R.E. GUR, “Diferencias en las funciones del cerebro entre los sexos”, in: VV.AA., *La mujer en el umbral del s. XXI*, Madrid 1997, 65–90; B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, *La complementariedad varón–mujer. Nuevas hipótesis*, op. cit., 16–17.

³⁷ Cf. G. ZUANAZZI, *L’età ambigua. Paradossi, risorse e turbamenti dell’adolescenza*, op. cit., 80; A. BARBARINO, L. DE MARINIS, “Ruolo degli ormoni gonadici sulla sessualizzazione cerebrale”, in: *Medicina e Morale*, 1984, 724– 729.

³⁸ Cf. S.J. DIMOND, “Evolution and lateralization of the brain. Concluding remarks”, in: *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1977, CCXCIX, 477; A. SERRA, “La biologia della sessualità in prospettiva pedagogica” in: G. ZUANAZZI, *L’educazione sessuale nella scuola*, Brezzo di Bédero 1989; M. ZOLLINO and G. NERI, “Le basi biologiche della differenziazione sessuale”, in: *Sessualità da ripensare*, Milano 1990, 21–22.

thoughts are sexed. Personality cannot be separated from what they call spirit, or from the organs that are not strictly sexual.³⁹

Studies on the human species are still open. However, there is no doubt that phenotypically (and this includes conduct) women and men differ.⁴⁰ Following Berge, we could say that, “the infinitely more developed complexity of the human psyche compared to animals does not allow us to clearly delineate the part of it that is under the immediate control of the sex hormones. However, no one would seriously deny the differences of male and female psychology.”⁴¹

In animals, as a consequence of the action of sex steroids, clear dysmorphisms have been observed in various structures of the nervous system. In humans, however, it seems that the differences relate mainly to the fact that one sex manifests a particular behaviour with greater frequency or intensity than the other. On the other hand, psychometric studies have demonstrated the existence of a variety of statistically significant differences with respect to cognitive skills between men and women. For example, Kimura⁴² studied the differences between the brains of men and women in the way they solve intellectual problems. She concluded that they possess different capacity models, not overall level of intelligence. Thus, one could argue that there is heterogeneity between the sexes in brain organisation for certain skills. But this difference does not imply a greater or lesser intelligence between them, but a complementary capability to observe and address reality.⁴³

³⁹ Cf. L. FEUERBACH, “La relación existente entre ‘La esencia del cristianismo’ y ‘El Único y su patrimonio’”, (1845), in: *Principios de la filosofía del futuro y otros escritos*, Barcelona 1989, 160.

⁴⁰ Cf. B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, *La complementariedad varón–mujer. Nuevas hipótesis*, op. cit., 23.

⁴¹ Cf. A. BERGE, *La educación sexual de la infancia*, Barcelona 1967, 134 and 83.

⁴² D. KIMURA, “Cerebro de varón y cerebro de mujer”, op. cit.

⁴³ Cf. B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “Lo masculino y lo femenino en el siglo XXI”, in: A. APARISI and J. BALLESTEROS (eds.), *Por un feminismo de la complementariedad. Nuevas perspectivas para la familia y el trabajo*, op. cit., 29.

That said, it should be noted that those differences do not allow us, as has sometimes been claimed, to divide the world into two planes, male and female, and to understand them as being two clearly demarcated areas. Nor is it permissible to refer to “virtues” or “values” that are exclusively masculine or feminine. As Blanca Castilla⁴⁴ points out, qualities and virtues are individual and personal. To have a good or bad ear or a good or bad voice does not depend on being male or female. Moreover, there may be men with great intuition and women with good technical skills. Qualities are individual and virtues belong to human nature, which is the same for both sexes. For that reason, you cannot make a distribution of virtues and qualities pertaining to each sex, and claim, for example, that tenderness applies to women and strength to men. Women generally show greater strength, especially with regard to pain, than many men. Moreover, men, especially after age 35 at least according to psychiatrists develop a great capacity for tenderness.⁴⁵

It may be instructive to mention Jung here. He discovered that each sex is complementary in itself. Jung realised that the sexes are not only complementary to each other, but also within each of them. He claimed that each man has his “anima” or his feminine side.⁴⁶ Likewise, each woman has her “animus” or male part. In this sense, we could interpret comments made by Ortega y Gasset on the painting

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

⁴⁵ According to Palazzani, to generalise behaviours that are considered, for example, typically feminine, involves the risk of stereotyping the image of women, since that would ignore the differences among women as well as between men and women. It would end up by idealising and elevating women to the status of being superior and knowing how to act in every situation (it would be like passing from paternalism to maternalism). On the contrary, virtues are human and individual, so each person has to develop them, whether they are male or female (Cf. L. PALAZZANI, “Los valores femeninos en bioética”, in: A. APARISI and J. BALLESTEROS (eds.), *Por un feminismo de la complementariedad. Nuevas perspectivas para la familia y el trabajo*, op. cit., 60).

⁴⁶ Cf. C.G. JUNG, “Concerning the archetypes, with special reference to the anima concept”, in: *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton 1980, 54–74.

of the Mona Lisa. In his opinion, Leonardo Da Vinci did not paint a picture of a woman, but the female part of his soul.⁴⁷

On this basis, it is true that men and women have generally complementary ways of perceiving and constructing reality. One could argue that the values, qualities and virtues “crystallise” differently in men and women. To put it another way, in general, female strength is different from male strength. At the same time, however, each one needs or complements the other.

Ballesteros⁴⁸ suggests a list of complementary values, or rather, of their different forms or “crystallisations”. They are (first male, second female): accuracy / analogy; superficial (longitudinal or linear) / depth; analysis / synthesis; deduction / intuition; competition / cooperation; growth / conservation; production / reproduction.

Blanca Castilla⁴⁹ gives the following list: long-term projects (magnanimity) / to capture and resolve needs with minimum effort (to economise); invent / maintain; the abstract / the concrete; rules / flexibility; justice / mercy; quantity / quality; expression / interpretation; concept / symbol; specialisation / overview.

It is important to emphasise that we do not find values or qualities to be higher in either sex, but rather that they are complementary perspectives and approaches to reality. It seems that several studies conducted on human behaviour have come to these conclusions. Overall, they emphasise that a man’s existence has the hallmark of “gravitating outwards”.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Cf. J. ORTEGA Y GASSET, *La Gioconda* [1911], in: *Obras Completas*, t. I, Madrid 1983, 553–560.

⁴⁸ J. BALLESTEROS, “Postmodernidad y neofeminismo: el equilibrio entre ‘anima’ y ‘animus’” in: *Postmodernidad: decadencia o resistencia*, Madrid 1989, 130.

⁴⁹ B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “Lo masculino y lo femenino en el siglo XXI”, in: A. APARISI and J. BALLESTEROS (eds.), *Por un feminismo de la complementariedad. Nuevas perspectivas para la familia y el trabajo*, op. cit., 37–38.

⁵⁰ Cf. PH. LERSCH, *Von Wesen der Geschlechter*, München–Basel 1968, 55ff, cit. in: G. ZUANAZZI, *L’età ambigua. Paradossi, risorse e turbamenti dell’adolescenza*, op. cit., 79.

Women, on the other hand, tend to look inwards.⁵¹ The world is presented to a man under the sign of struggle and conquest. It is generally a “world of things”. However, for the female it is, rather, a “world of people”.⁵² Because of their outward position, men can sometimes experience the world as hostile, and they apply, to a greater extent, the logic of violence – of men over men and men over nature –. On the other hand, femininity generally leads to the proximity of human life. The world is then conceived as a horizon of values in which the logic of reconciliation prevails – humans with humans and humans with nature. All of this could be summarised by saying that, in general, males have a greater ability to control things and handle abstract ideas, and women greater ease of understanding and dealing with people. However, it must be stressed that both perspectives are necessary and complementary in order to construct reality.

In any case, for men as well as for women, the important thing is the transcendental dimension of a person, the care and service to another. It is understood that human beings are more themselves the more others are important for them. As we have said, the person, male and female, is built on interdependence with others. Relationship is the radical constitutive element of human existence. The centrality of service to others derives from this. Indeed, the defense of human dignity can be built only upon the recognition of the priority of caring for others. It is only in this way that the genuine humanisation that society needs will be achieved. In this regard, John Paul II, in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, emphasised that the ethical superiority of women lies in their ability to care for the human being and to be custodians of life.

This approach, which attempts to lay the foundations for a more ethical and humane society, has also been outlined by the American professor Jean Bethke Elstain, in her famous book *Public Man, Private Woman*, where she states that an alternative to feminist protest seeking the complete absorption of women within the corporation

⁵¹ Cf. E.H. ERIKSON, *Infanzia e società*, Roma 1967, 91ff.

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*

should not lose touch with the traditional sphere of women. The world of women emerged from a die of care and concern for others. Any viable human community must have among its members a significant sector dedicated to protecting the vulnerable. That has historically been the mission of women. The unfortunate thing is not that women reflect an ethic of social responsibility, but that the public world, mostly, has repudiated this ethic.⁵³

The reciprocity model therefore needs to combine at the same time the struggle for equal rights between men and women, a field in which there is still much to be done, with the defense of the differential characteristics of women, closely connected to their ability to be mothers. It is here that their genuine mindset lies, one that is capable, in many cases, of going beyond cold calculating logic by using the logic of the heart.⁵⁴ In this way we can build a more humane society, as Castilla points out, based on the need to “build a family with a father and a culture with a mother”.⁵⁵ The reality is that every child needs the love of a father and mother and also the love they both have for each other.

Therefore, the key is to understand that those values assigned by modernity to womanhood—the care, service and diligent attention to others, and the attitude of giving the best of themselves, should not pertain exclusively to women. On the contrary, they are equally indispensable for men if they are to avoid becoming beings who are concerned only for power and competition with others. Hence it is necessary for men to cultivate attitudes of respect, care and appreciation for life, their active presence in the home and their sharing of the responsibilities of the home.

⁵³ Cf. J.B. ELSHTAIN, *Public man, Private Woman in Social and Political Thought*, Princeton 1981.

⁵⁴ Cf. J. BALLESTEROS, *Postmodernidad: decadencia o resistencia*, op. cit., 133.

⁵⁵ B. CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR, “Lo masculino y lo femenino en el siglo XXI”, in: A. APARISI and J. BALLESTEROS (eds.), *Por un feminismo de la complementariedad. Nuevas perspectivas para la familia y el trabajo*, op. cit., 29.

It is also important to note that labour and social structures also need the “genius” and the values that are traditionally represented by women. This makes them more livable, and accommodates them to the needs of each stage of life of the people, so that every human being can give, in every circumstance, the best of themselves. Therefore, the gradual process of incorporation of women into the social, cultural and business environment is not only a demand for justice, but also something extremely positive for society. Women incorporate in their professional and social life principles, values and priorities among which the family is central. In view of the hardness and aggressive competitiveness that largely govern labour relations, values which have been traditionally represented by women are a guarantee of the humanisation of work.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, gender ideology dilutes the identity of human beings, originally created as male and female, by proposing a “neutral” model that is foreign to reality. A person is considered to be a mere cultural product, a mere “self–construction”. Against this, the model of reciprocity is an attempt to overcome two types of reductionism: the biological and the cultural. It is based on the equal dignity of man and woman, and therefore it tries to integrate harmoniously that which is received and that which is constructed, nature and culture, equality and difference, biology and freedom. In this context, it is still a pending task of philosophical anthropology to explain how gender attunes with personal structure, that is, the development of the personal and relational dimension of the sexual condition, in order to better understand personal identity and its implications on family and social relationships.

Women and the culture of death: Abortion, contraception, end of life

LIGAYA ACOSTA*

“The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling”.¹

Beautiful words indeed of Pope Paul VI, in his address to women during the closing of the Second Vatican Council, amply quoted in the first paragraph of Saint John Paul II’s great Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Indeed, this is a clear recognition of the crucial role of women in the world, and a prophetic pronouncement of what would be needed today – “women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel”!

As we face an increasingly secular and materialistic world, the role of women as bearers of life is consciously and masterfully being turned upside down. Today, very sadly, fertility is considered a disease, treated with killer contraceptives now considered as “essential medicines”! When contraceptives fail – which they do many times,

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¹ PAUL VI, Message to women on the occasion of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 8 December 1965. Cit. in: JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 1.

abortion conveniently becomes an option, which they say is a human right and/or a women's right, even if they murder another life! Of course, when children see that their mother can kill their siblings through contraception and abortion, what is there to prevent them from killing us when we become old? When we consider children as burdens easily disposed of through abortion, for sure the weak and the elderly can also be easily disposed of, and thus euthanasia sets in. They are fruits coming from the same poisonous tree.

In China, which implements a strict one-child policy, there is what is called an 8-4-2-1 society² – one child taking care of two parents, four grandparents, and eight great grandparents. More likely to be spoiled and self-centered, these children often neglect their parents later, causing a lot of loneliness on the part of the elderly, and a host of other related problems. As the demographic winter becomes more pronounced, governments feel that the elderly are taking much of its resources through pensions and medical benefits, and so they legislate for euthanasia! They even call it a “patient's right” or “death with dignity”, even if in reality it is murder!

How warped indeed our values have become. A lot of people fail to realize the important mission of the elderly in being a witness to the past and a source of wisdom for the young and the future. They are, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once said, the memory and heritage of families.

Truly indeed the world is forgetting or has forgotten what is most basic – that life is God's most precious gift. Since it is God who gives life, it is only He who can take it away. When we take God out of the equation, perversion follows. This we see today all over the world.

I visited a home for the aged recently during a trip to Taiwan. What I saw was a gloomy scenario. Despite their air-conditioned beautiful building and plenty of food and earthly comforts, the elderly had faces which looked like Good Friday.

² Cf. M. LIU, “China: Desperately Seeking Daughters”, in: *Newsweek*, 8 March 2008. <http://www.newsweek.com/china-desperately-seeking-daughters-83991>.

In Taiwan as in many other developed countries in the world, people, I was told, are too busy filling their bank accounts. They work even on supposedly rest days to bring in more money, and therefore they do not want children. Then when they become old, they realize that money cannot buy them happiness.

In contrast, developing countries like my country the Philippines, even when poor, have plenty of smiles on their faces. The elderly are surrounded by loving children and grandchildren... Even people living in the slums are joyful, amidst the stinking heaps of garbage which provide them a living. Foreigners are perplexed. I only have one answer to that – we may be poor materially but we are so rich spiritually. It is a joy that only God who is love can give.

Of course I do not condone this kind of living. Often, I cry seeing the horrible conditions and ask myself how on earth can our governments allow this to happen? How can the world which is supposed to be modern and civilized, spend mind-boggling amounts of money on arms to further kill and maim the world – ironically to attain peace? Very sadly, their solution is to provide more contraceptives and legalize abortion. It is a case of eradicating poverty by eliminating the poor. Very subtly and deceptively, they are even using vaccines for birth control. Since the promotion of the culture of death is greased by mind-boggling amounts of money too difficult to resist, governments and non-government organizations toe the line.

If we truly care for the poor, why don't we use the billions of money given as aid/grants for contraceptives, abortion, and population control, to fund genuine livelihood opportunities for them to build houses and schools, and fund their education? If we did this, there would be no more poor people in this world. If we sterilize people or give them pills and condoms, is it going to put food on their table? Perhaps we will only succeed in replacing large poor families with small poor families. But certainly, it will not solve poverty. The poor indeed are, as Mother Teresa said, our *practicum* to prepare us for heaven.

But of course we know that the massive promotion of contraceptives and the culture of death – divorce, euthanasia, total population control and homosexuality, are part of a covert global anti-life agenda used by unscrupulous governments and groups in the developed world to be able to control the world and get the natural resources of the poor countries for their own selfish ends. They fail to realize or perhaps refuse to acknowledge that there is enough for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed.

In the once top secret document – the National Security Study Memorandum 200 written by then U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, it mentions women's empowerment as one of the strategies for population control – taking women out of their homes to work, because if they stay only in the homes, they will produce more children. They want zero population growth by promoting one or two child policies, in the guise of population and development and/or sustainable development. It also talks of using the United Nations agencies, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization, among others, to implement their evil agenda, as well as the withholding of aid to countries that do not follow.

Very sadly, countless women have fallen into the trap, without knowing the many horrors of contraception and abortion until it is too late. Even the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organization has, from 2005 to 2013, consistently classified the pill as a Group 1 Carcinogen, which means the highest level of cancer risk!³ To quote IARC, it says, "*Women increase their risk of breast, cervical and liver cancer if they use oral contraceptives and the greatest cancer risk is to young women, particularly teenagers, who use the pill.*"⁴ These and other killer effects like high blood pressure, increased risk of stroke or heart attack, cancers of the breast

³ WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, *Monographs of the International Agency for Research on Cancer*, 2005–2013, <http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Classification/ClassificationsAlphaOrder.pdf>. See also: INTERNATIONAL AGENCY FOR RESEARCH ON CANCER (IARC/WHO), Press release no. 167, 29 July 2005.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

and reproductive organs, osteoporosis, blurring of vision/blindness, infertility, birth defects, gall bladder disease, liver tumors, increased risk of getting HIV/AIDS, mood disorders, and loss of libido or sexual pleasure, among many others, are very amply borne out by scientific evidence.⁵ People never learn, or perhaps no one has ever told them.

⁵ See, among others: Y. DAVIDSON, “Estrogen Carcinogenesis in Breast Cancer”, in: *New England Journal of Medicine*, January 2006, Vol. 354, no. 3, 270–282; C. KAHLENBORN *et al.*, “Oral Contraceptive Use as a Risk Factor for Premenopausal Breast Cancer: A Meta-analysis”, *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 2006, 81(10), 1290–1302; C. KAHLENBORN, “Breast Cancer, Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill”, *One More Soul*, 2000, 229–231; K. HUME, *Effects of Contraceptive Medication on the Cervix. The Biology of the Cervix*. <http://archive.org/page/474833/2012-10-18/>; <http://www.woomb.org/omrrca/bulletin/vol25/no2/effects.shtml>; also: http://www.nfpoutreach.org/Q&A/cervix_63.htm; J.K.G. MALI *et al.*, “Contraceptive Use and the Risk of HIV Infection in Nairobi, Kenya”, in: *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, 1995, Vol. 48 (Issue 1), 61–67; PANZER, WISE, GOLDSTEIN, *et al.*, “Impact of Oral Contraceptives on Sex Hormone-Binding Globulin and Androgen Levels: A Retrospective Study in Women with Sexual Dysfunction”, *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, January 2006, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 104–113; M. HVISTENDAHL, “Birth Control Pills Shown to Alter Structure of Women’s Brains”, 1.10.2010 (popsci.com), also discussed in a study published August 2008 (Proceedings of the Royal Society B) by evolutionary Psychologist, Craig Roberts; also: thepillkills.com; F.G. DUNN, J.V. JONES, R. FIFE, “Malignant Hypertension Associated with Use of Oral Contraceptives”, *Br Heart J*, Mar 1975; 37(3): 336–338; B.C. TANIS *et al.* “Oral Contraceptives and the Risk of Myocardial Infarction”, *New England Journal of Medicine*, 2001; 345:1787–93; L.A. GIL-LUM, “Ischemic Stroke Risk with Oral Contraceptives”, *JAMA* 5.07.2000; 284:72–78; J. DOLLE *et al.*, “Risk Factors for Triple Negative Breast Cancer in Women under the Age of 45”, *Cancer, Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention* 2009;18(4):1157–65; NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE, *Oral Contraceptives and Cancer Risk*, 21.03.2012 citing V. MORENO, F.X. BOSCH, N. MUNOZ *et al.*, “Effect of oral contraceptives on risk of cervical cancer in women with human papillomavirus infection”, the IARC multi-centric case-control study, *Lancet* 2002; 359 (9312):1085–1092; S. FRANCESCHI *et al.*, “Genital warts and cervical neoplasia: an epidemiological study”, *British Journal of Cancer* 1983; 48:621–28; C.C. WANG *et al.*, “Risk of HIV infection in oral contraceptive pill users: a meta-analysis”, *JAIDS* 1.5.1999; 21 (1): 51–58; R. HEFFORN *et al.*, “Use of hormonal contraceptives and risk of HIV-1 transmission: a prospective cohort study”, *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, 2012; 12: 19–26; see also “Women

The Bible tells us: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (*Hosea* 4:6).

Gender feminists position themselves as pro-women and yet promote contraceptives and abortion which kill women! They also say they want a safe and satisfying sex life, which means sex for pleasure only, free of the possibility of pregnancy and children. But research has also proven that the use of the pill results in the loss of libido or loss of sexual pleasure,⁶ as well as mood disorder,⁷ leading to divorce and broken marriages and families. In their quest for false freedom, they become slaves of their own passions, and thus become unhappy.

Truly indeed what is happening today vindicates Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* which predicted that contraception would lead to conjugal infidelity, a general lowering of morality, and lead men to treat women as “mere instruments of selfish enjoyment”,⁸ rather than as cherished partners; and finally, that widespread acceptance of contraception by couples would lead to a massive imposition of contraception by unscrupulous governments.

How dreadfully his prophecy has been vindicated. It is worse in some countries like India and China where there is a preference for males. Female babies are intentionally murdered in the womb.

Speak For Themselves” *amicus curiae*, brief footnotes for list of references on the website <http://p0.vresp.com/pZg1sR>; see more at: <http://culture-of-life.org/blog/medical-health-risks-contraception#sthash.bfyBn8op.dpuf>, accessed on 10.08.2013; B.C. TANIS, “Oral contraceptives and the risk of myocardial infarction”, *Eur Heart J.* 2003 Mar; 24(5): 377–380; C. KAHLENBORN, “What a Woman Should Know about Birth Control”, <http://onemoresoul.com/contraception-abortion/risks-consequences/what-a-woman-should-know-about-birth-control.html>, accessed 06.09.2013.

⁶ Cf. PANZER, WISE, GOLDSTEIN et. al., “Impact of oral contraceptives on sex hormone-binding globulin and androgen levels: a retrospective study in women with sexual dysfunction”, *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, January 2006, Vol. 3, issue 1, 104–113.

⁷ Cf. M. HVISTENDAHL, “Birth Control Pills Shown to alter Structure of Women's Brains”, *cit.*; also discussed in a study published August 2008 in the *Royal Society Proceedings B* by evolutionary psychologist, Craig Roberts.

⁸ PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae vitae*, n. 17.

While there is so much hype on women's empowerment, they conveniently forget that this right begins in the womb – at conception!

As Cardinal Raymond Burke, Prefect of the Apostolic Signature, has said, “Through the spread of the contraceptive mentality, especially among the young, human sexuality is no longer seen as the gift of God, which draws a man and a woman together, in a bond of lifelong and faithful love, crowned by the gift of new human life, but rather, as a tool for personal gratification.” “Correcting this contraceptive thinking is,” he said, “essential to the advancement of the culture of life.”⁹

I love how Pope John Paul II says it in *Familiaris Consortio*: “When couples, by means of recourse to contraception, separate these two meanings that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as arbiters of the divine plan and they manipulate and degrade human sexuality – and with it themselves and their married partner – by altering its value of total self-giving.”¹⁰

By breaking the natural and divinely ordained connection between sex and procreation, women and men especially would focus on the hedonistic possibilities of sex. People would cease seeing sex as something that was intrinsically linked to new life and to the sacrament of marriage.

As the Theologian of the Papal Household, Rev. Wojciech Giertych, OP, said, “When sexuality is not tied with the virtue of chastity, which trains the person in how to integrate the sexual desire within charity, then everything is rocked...once contraception became so easily available we see distortions of sexuality, and problems on the level of human relationships, of marriages breaking down, of a violent aggressiveness of women who are discovering that they are

⁹ R. BURKE, *Advancing the Culture of Life in Hope and with Obedience*, Keynote address at McHenry County Catholic Prayer Breakfast, Crystal Lake, Illinois, October 29, 2011 (www.rockforddiocese.org/pdfs/Burke_Address.pdf).

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 32.

being abused as a result of contraception, and so they are landing in an aggressive feminism, with rage against men.” “Contraception”, he also said, “is leading to abortion, because it treats the potential child as an enemy, and if something goes wrong and a child is conceived, then the child is easily aborted.”¹¹

Of course the relationship between contraception and abortion is well-established. Even the pro-abortion Allan Guttmacher Institute, research arm of the number one abortionist organization in the world, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), has found that “54 percent of women who have abortions had used a contraceptive method (usually condom or the pill) during the month they became pregnant.”¹²

Dr. Malcolm Potts, former Medical Director of IPPF has also said, “As people turn to contraception, there will be a rise, not a fall, in the abortion rate.”¹³

We now have abortion on demand. Mothers have horribly become the killers of their very own children. Women, who are supposed to be bearers of life, are being devoured by the serpent. Certainly the devil wants to destroy the womb of the woman for it was through it that he was defeated. Of course, the devil, knowing that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God, would always want to obliterate every reminder of God’s face, power, love, and mercy.

It is in this vein that peddlers of the culture of death are desperately trying to take God out of the consciousness of people.

¹¹ J.-H. WESTEN, *On contraception and the coming violence*, video interview with the Theologian of the Papal Household, Rev. Wojciech Giertych O.P., 11 July 2013, available on the website www.lifesitenews.com/news/on-contraception-and-the-coming-violence-interview-with-popes-personal-theo.

¹² Research in 2011 by the Allan Guttmacher Pro-Abortion Institute, available on the website: www.trying-to-conceive.com/womens-life-health/news/birth-control-not-preventing-unwanted-pregnancies/, accessed 25.04.2013.

¹³ Cf. A. SCHOLBERG, “The Abortionists and Planned Parenthood: Familiar Bedfellows”, *International Review of Natural Family Planning*, Winter 1980, 298.

They know that the source of all truth will always illumine one's heart and mind. Therefore, they attack the Catholic Church and its teachings, and frantically portray the issue as just a religious one, malevolently insisting on the separation of Church and state. They label the Catholic Church as "archaic" and say that we need to keep up with the modern times. What they conveniently forget is, as Pope Paul VI said, the Church is only a repository of truth. It cannot change the teachings that Christ Himself taught.

There is a need to recover an awareness of the primacy of moral values and recapture the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values. We need to ally science with Divine wisdom to bring about the true advancement of women and of the human person in his or her whole truth, freedom, and dignity. Once and for all, women need to understand that, as Saint John Paul says in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, "God entrusts the human being to her in a special way." As bearers of life, women need to understand that motherhood is the privilege and greatness of a woman, as it means the power to bear life and the capacity to nurture life. Without children, there is no future. Even if they enter the religious life, women can be spiritually fruitful – the father and mother of many by nurturing the moral, emotional, and spiritual lives of others.

Thus, the "perfect woman", says St. John Paul, becomes an irreplaceable support and source of spiritual strength for other people who perceive the great energies of her spirit. These perfect women, he says in the same apostolic letter, "are owed much by their families, and sometimes by whole nations."¹⁴

This can only happen when the woman herself is, as Paul VI said, "impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel".¹⁵ Unless she understands and lives the basic tenets of her faith, and knows the logic behind the Church's teachings on life and family, it would be easy for her to fall.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

¹⁵ PAUL VI, Message to women on the occasion of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, cit.

Indeed there is an urgent need to bring back women, and men, to the basics, and reclaim the world for God, starting the journey within one's own self, and ultimately flowing to others with God's grace, blooming wherever God plants us, so that others, especially those who are lost, will find their way back.

Just as it was Mary that gave birth to Christ in the world to restore the fullness of life, women can be the inspiration and drive for all humankind to bring the image of God in marriage and the family back into the world.

It is thus very timely and urgent for us to re-visit *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and proclaim its wisdom with urgency to the whole world.

Let us call on Mary, our Blessed Mother and most powerful intercessor, to always hold us close to her, and envelope us and the whole world in her mantle of love and protection. May Saint Michael the Archangel defend us in battle and may everything we do glorify the Lord!

Understanding the education emergency*

FRANCO NEMBRINI**

Although you may not appreciate what I have to say, I hope that you will appreciate at least my courage in being here at this table. I am the only family man here, I think, and, as you have just heard from my poor biography, I do not even have the academic and scholarly qualifications of my lady colleagues here. So, I ask forgiveness for the poverty of the observations that I shall make. They are drawn simply from my life story, from what I have learned during my career in education and from all I learned growing up. Indeed, all I learned about education was primarily passed on to me by my father and my mother, two farmers from Bergamo. I am the fourth of ten children, so I saw education in action every day. Thirty–six years of teaching then gave me some more awareness of the subject. So, I shall keep this all very simple, within the short time at our disposal, by mentioning some ideas to help reflect on education. I shall try to simply give suggestions.

First, however, let me tell you of a thought that has occurred to me as we draw to the conclusion of this first day of the conference. We talked about a very serious problem: the issue of violence against women – mentioned several times today – or the dominance of men over women. I just want to say that I am beginning to think that all of us are in a bad way. We could discuss whether the elderly or children are in a worse condition, women or men, the South or the North...

* Transcribed from the recorded speech, given in Italian, and reviewed by the speaker.

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The problem is that all of humanity is sick. Humanity is wounded as it leaves behind a certain tradition. It has thrown away two thousand years of Christianity that, for better or for worse, built up a particular identity of man, woman, child and elder, one of good and of bad, of sorrow and of joy. This humanity had in some way constructed a kind of anthropology. I would like to start from here because it seems to me that it is this consideration that helps us to understand the meaning of education emergency. It is not a matter of finding strategies, or new teaching tools, or reforms of educational systems or instructions issued by governments. It includes all of this, obviously. First of all, as a basis for all of this, I think that we should remind ourselves of the meaning of education.

In 2002, in Africa, we carried out a project with Father Bepi Berton, a Xaverian priest who died just a month ago. We built a small school in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which later grew bigger. The construction began two years after the end of the terrible civil war that had devastated the country. When we inaugurated the elementary school, there was a small celebration attended by the Deputy Minister of Education. The country had been affected very badly and placed at the bottom of all the rankings and all the indicators of progress and welfare in the world. I discovered to my astonishment that the law of that country provided for the state financing of schools, including Catholic schools and private schools, and I remember saying to that Deputy Minister: “But, you still have dead bodies in the streets, you lack structures and electricity in the whole country, you have no hospitals, women are dying in the street in an attempt to reach a hospital before giving birth, and you can give money to Catholic schools?”. He replied solemnly: “But, Professor Nembrini, are you not an expert in education? Tell me, where should a badly battered country like ours start from if not from education?” So, it seems to me that this is the idea that I should convey and that I give to you now, precisely because this is a period of crisis, a period with upheavals that are difficult to manage from every point of view.

It is because educational institutions like the Church, schools and families are in crisis that we must have the courage to start again from the beginning. The beginning, as we have repeated several times today, is Mary. Mary is the beginning we had two thousand years ago. This is what I feel as an educator. It might seem trivial, but the feeling I have when I go to class is just as one might have felt two thousand years ago. Those thirty children seated before me are my Zacchaeuses and Magdalens who just need to hear that someone is prepared to give their lives for them. This is the most serious crisis in education, in my opinion, at least in the West. Although I later discovered this to be equally true in Africa, Siberia and Brazil. I would like to leave you with this definition of education as food for thought. Education is a simple thing. It is testimony of something great, of positivity in life. I always say I became an educator on the day that I met the eyes of my son, the first of my four children. I remember one Sunday afternoon when I was working, I caught his eye as he was silently watching me while I was doing my task, without asking anything. In that silent gaze that did not ask his father for anything to eat or drink, clothing or games, but just watched his father, I remember, as if it were today, I felt as if he were asking me a question: "Dad, can you assure me that it was worth coming into the world? Give me a reason to hope. I can forgive you for anything else, for anything we may lack. I can forgive you for anything, but not for absence of hope." Look, our children forgive us for many things, more than we can imagine, in fact, more than we forgive them.

Well, it seems to me that our generation of children, at least in the West, are suffering precisely from that. My generation reasoned that "the world sucks, but we can make it, we will change it". We all know what happened, for God's sake. The present generation, however, has undergone a fundamental anthropological mutation. They no longer just say, "the world sucks". They say of themselves, "I suck". The fundamental educational question they are expressing has become a radical question. It is the need for forgiveness.

Many have written to me and I could read you hundreds of letters. Here is one: “Franco, I need only one thing: a place that does not suck and where I am not afraid to be what I am. I need a place where I can forgive myself”. These kids need a place, relationships, adults who have a great feeling of positivity about life and who can embrace and truly forgive their children, that is, who really want the best for them. To want the best – I too learned this – is not what we often say we want. It is difficult to want the best for someone. There is a way of wanting the best that is mistaken. Many years ago a child in elementary school was parsing the sentence “my mother loves me”. He wrote: “my: obsessive adjective”. There was truth in that! There is a way of loving that is burdensome. It is a sort of blackmail. I could love you if you ... if you were different. This generation of youngsters need parents who look at them and say: “I would give my life for you just as you are”. This is love. God loved us first, while we were still sinners. God did not ask us to change ourselves first. We must start to do this without any illusions.

I think the time has gone when we consumed years and paper in discussing whether it was the fault of the family or the school. Families blamed the schools and schools blamed the families. Then, when they came together they blamed society. We must start somewhere else, as adults who can say to their children – or better, who witness to their children – “I am happy, I am happy because of the life I lead and the calling I am answering”.

My ‘sacred page’ is chapter 6 of Deuteronomy: “In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws ...?’” (*Dt* 6:20). When our children ask us about our values, for example: “Dad, why do I have to do what you say? Why should I be fair, truthful, chaste, and work hard and love others?” What reasons can we give this generation so that they can follow us? It would not be because they are values or that they are written in certain documents. It would not be because the priest says so or the pope says so. There is only one reason why our children can follow us, and it is the reason given in Deuteronomy: “tell him: ‘We were slaves

... but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand'. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day" (*Dt* 6: 21,24). Education begins when an adult picks up on that question and hands a response and testimony on to their children, to a generation that has such need of it. Otherwise they will be crushed by suffering that inevitably will make them more violent, and this will no longer be towards others ... it is often towards themselves. There are so many disorders – youngsters who cut themselves, anorexia, etc. – that have aspects of self punishment. This generation of youth do not like themselves because nobody likes them or forgives them. Nobody is pleased with them, to use words that Pascoli wrote in a beautiful poem one hundred years ago.

I am just saying that we can set out from this new (indeed this old) concept, together with the Church that never turns back, but rather always sets out from the origin, that is, Christ. By setting out from there, from testimony like this, I think that the issue of education fits in correctly here, and also the whole question of sex, family and gender that we talked about today and will continue to discuss tomorrow. However, I feel that this beginning should be courageously resumed, and the Church should be very decisive in this and take large and important decisions in favour of education. Everything that educates today and that fosters what I have described, must be defended, increased and encouraged.

When the law is an ally of ethical subjectivism

GABRIELLA GAMBINO*

In a course that was held at the University of Freiburg in 1940 on “Nietzsche: the European nihilism”, Martin Heidegger dedicated several lessons to explaining from whence “sprang the domain of the subjective which guides all of humanity and our understanding of the modern world”,¹ something that still pervades post-modernity. Since Descartes, Heidegger explained, all that is, including humans, became “subjects”, or *subiectum*, “that which underlies and is the foundation, that which by itself is already before” reality. The metaphysical question on the meaning of entity has since then been transformed into a question on method in order to find an absolute foundation for truth, and the *cogito, ergo sum* became the unshakeable foundation of all certainty.²

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¹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Der europäische Nihilismus*, 1961 (Trans. English: *Nietzsche IV: Nihilism*, edited by D.F. Krell, translated by F.A. Capuzzi, New York 1982), 167.

² Cf. A. PESSINA, “Le buone ragioni del soggettivismo etico e i suoi errori. Note su bioetica, relativismo e metafisica”, in: *Medicina e Morale*, 2006/3, 485–499. The concept of subjectivism was first seen in Pragmatism between the nineteenth and twentieth century in the United States – today’s Neopragmatism – as a philosophical reference that places practical activity, which is able to act directly on reality, above speculative truths. In the light of Pragmatism, the very validity of truth is subjected to its practical verification. The classical concept of theoretical truth was replaced by the concept of practical utility which became a form of anti-essentialism that lay the foundation for an epistemology of relativism (there is no truth, but as many truths as there are cultural contexts). In the first half of the twentieth century, subjectivism found new modes of expression in logical positivism (or neo-positivism) centred on

Cartesian liberation from the revealed truth of Christianity imposed the need to restate the foundations of freedom that individual subjects identify in themselves and in their own ability to give themselves their own law. It was Immanuel Kant who explained to modernity the meaning of the independent action of a human subject. To act freely is to act according to a law that I myself declare, not according to the terms prescribed by nature or by social conventions, but according to the purpose that I propose myself. In ethical subjectivism, the morality of the action comes to depend on the intention, on the individual's motive and on the human subjects and what they choose to be, without restrictions of any kind, and being guided only by human reason.³ It follows that morality cannot be based either on facts or on objective and transcendent values, but only on "free" and rational choice understood in the strong sense of the human subject.⁴ Benedict XVI gave a beautiful image when he spoke about *closed* reasoning, positivist reasoning that is unable to open up to reality and nature: "reason which recognises nothing beyond mere functionality resembles a concrete bunker with no windows, in which we ourselves provide lighting and atmospheric conditions, being no longer willing to obtain either from God's wide world".⁵

the idea that philosophy should aspire to the same rigour as the sciences by using experience and the criteria of language analysis. According to this approach, a proposition has meaning only to the extent that it is verifiable, and these are only the empirical propositions and the analytical truths.

³ The human being is no longer so much an ontological as an *ego-logical* unit: they no longer know how to appeal to the laws of nature or God, but to their own reasoning which becomes the legislator of the world. See: U. GALIMBERTI, *Psiche e techné. L'uomo nell'età della tecnica*, Milano 2011, 365.

⁴ Cf. U. SCARPELLI, *Bioetica laica*, Milano 1998.

⁵ He continues: "The windows must be flung open again, we must see the wide world, the sky and the earth once more and learn to make proper use of all this", BENEDICT XVI, Address to the German Bundestag in Berlin, 22 September 2011.

Even today the doctrine of ethical subjectivism⁶ starts from the assumption that human beings, insofar as they are free, are subject only to the obligations that are voluntarily assumed. It is only consensual acts that constrain the individual. Hence all that is freely wanted and accepted is licit, but it has to be *made possible* by the complicity of law.

The fact that the law and, in particular, legislation are distorted by the ubiquity of an *atomistic* conception of the individual is an obvious fact. Even from a superficial reading of the laws and recent judgments, especially in the field of bioethics and the biojuridical (think of the new legislation on family law, reproductive life, end-of-life decisions and the definition of sexuality), we see emerging a particular idea of the human person. This is no longer an abstract human subject, according to the classical formula in natural law that identified the modern human being as a self-referential micro-cosmos with inviolable rights and interests; but rather a *concrete* human subject, a concentration of absolute will and freedom, with self-determination and autonomy, with preferences and self-referential desires, who must have a voice that is guaranteed in the public sphere as well as in the private. These are free and self-determining human subjects who demand immediate public recognition in every area of their lives: from the definition of their own sexuality, their way of forming a family, their decision to have or not to have children, their choice about how these children should be and how they should be conceived and come into the world, to what “to do” with their own body, and the decision of when and how to end their own life.

Legal systems in Western countries are carrying out a unique parallel between the “scientific concept that tends to blur *objective limits* to human action and the new concept of freedom, in turn conceived as abolition of the *regulatory limit*”,⁷ with obvious repercussions on the

⁶ Philosophical expressions of ethical subjectivism are neo-illuminism, ethical liberalism, nihilistic existentialism, neo-positivist scientism, emotionalism and decisionism.

⁷ L. VIOLINI, “I diritti fondamentali e il loro futuro: il banco di prova del biodiritto”, in: A. PIN (ed.), *I nuovi diritti dell'uomo. Le sfide della società plurale*, Venezia 2012, 121–142.

moral, social and existential levels. Scientific progress allows, on the one hand, the exercise of freedom of choice that continues to extend further and, on the other hand, the achievement of the principle/right to self-determination which now more and more easily reduces the essential and *constitutive* dimension of human beings⁸ to being a mere expression of their *voluntas*. No one in institutions and jurisdictions can question the logic of this or the *great importance that this seems to give even to human dignity*, although no explicit mention of this can be found in any constitution regulations. The principle of self-determination, thought of as the highest expression of a person in law and legal freedom, has long been accepted as the central node of contemporary bioethics and the basis of *new rights* that each day take shape in the context of situations that oscillate and fluctuate between desire for and rejection of human life: the right to abortion, the right to terminate one's own life, the right not to be born, even to the right to a child, to be born only if healthy, and to be left alone in making decisions.⁹ It is almost as if the legislative dressing-up of desires might magically assure us of their fulfillment.¹⁰ Legality thus comes to prevail over justice when the insistence on human rights makes them appear to be the exclusive result of legislative enactments or normative decisions taken by those who are in power.¹¹

These rights are the expression of a human subject who is self-defining, reproduces, becomes ill and lives with the idea of "having to" die outside of any human relatedness. This applies even more to women. They more than anyone, and despite technological interventions, still remain at the centre of the most meaningful of human relationships: from the birth of their children until the death of the people who are most dear.

⁸ See: S. RODOTÀ, *Il diritto di avere diritti*, Roma 2012, 260.

⁹ Cf. H.T. ENGELHARDT, *Manuale di bioetica*, Milano 1999, 304ff.

¹⁰ Cf. L. ANTONINI, Introduction, in: IDEM (ed.), *Il traffico dei diritti insaziabili*, Soveria Mannelli 2007, 5.

¹¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, New York, 18 April 2008.

The image of the human being that emerges from much of the existing regulatory framework and the *de iure condendo* is, in fact, that of human subjects guided solely by their own desires and contingent preferences. It is hard to identify authentic values.

Modern subjectivism, as has been well demonstrated by contemporary philosophical reflection, arises not only from a radical devaluation of values, but even more from the uprooting of a *conscious need for values* through widespread education that increasingly ignores values that have been valid until now, and through the extinction of tradition and history.¹² It follows from this that human subjects in modern times should be able to find in themselves the criteria for an adequate interpretation of reality. While ethical subjectivism finds criteria for good and evil in self-determination and in the utilitarian principle of desirable/undesirable, contemporary law finds in its own functional and contingent rationality the criteria for right and wrong. The legal system assumes in this way formats of a legislative engine that claims to be an expression of general consent and will the sum of individual wills, but only of those who are politically more powerful which are recognised only insofar as they are positivised in laws which are made contingent, that is, without any preconditions that are value-binding, and that are mutable.¹³ It is a right, therefore, that is always convertible and that has in itself the conditions for its own negation.¹⁴ This explains the regulatory decisions that suddenly, without legal arguments that are rational and consistent, can introduce

¹² Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Der europäische Nihilismus*, cit., 32.

¹³ Benedict XVI explains how the repercussions of the “mutation” of the rational human structure – “humiliated and constrained” within the measurable, a concept of scientism and positivism – on legal-political orders can be devastating. There are no longer any limits to the will for power, but only a stronger will. Justice is reduced to the extent of “only” law, understood as a majority decision. The dictatorship of the majority becomes again “a spectre haunting Europe”. Cf. M. CARTABIA, A. SIMONCINI, *Benedetto XVI e il pensiero giuridico*, in: M. CARTABIA, A. SIMONCINI (ed.), op. cit., 30.

¹⁴ Cf. F. D’AGOSTINO, “*Il diritto tra tradizione e contingenza*”, in: IDEM, *Diritto e religione*, Rome 2013, 89ff.

new definitions of marriage, of paternity and maternity, of life that deserves to live, or new rights not to be born, to be aborted, to deny the assumptions of one's existence and to claim compensation for it.

No wonder that, in recent years, authoritative doctrine has defined subjectivism as “one of the wrongs of modern law”, where by subjectivism we understand subjectivist atomism that can exasperate the subjective dimension “to the point of reducing and sacrificing the multifaceted complexity of legality”.¹⁵

Since the modern period began, even the evolution of the legal system is described in terms of a progressive loss of the ability of the law to be *organisation* but rather it has become individual *potestas*. Primacy has thus passed from the ability to recognise an *order of reason* in the identification of rights to what the subject is able to transform into law.¹⁶

A careful analysis of the most recent legal developments shows that there are at least four particular areas in which ethical subjectivism manages to be expressed and to find an ally in contemporary legislation. Areas that seem closely inter-connected through an insidious principle of rationality that makes one the inevitable consequence of the other: a) The sphere of subjective self-perception as a criterion for self-definition in the new categories of gender in relation to human sexuality; b) the family; c) privacy; d) the right to self-determination.

a) The transformation of sexual bipolarity into multi-gender categories has now been partially implemented in Italy by legislation. On the one hand the aim is to be anti-discriminatory with regard to women and vulnerable people, and on the other hand it has become an accomplice to an ideology that is determined to deny the truth about human sexuality.

¹⁵ See P. GROSSI, “Un recupero per il diritto: oltre il soggettivismo moderno”, in: L. ANTONINI (ed.), *Il traffico dei diritti insaziabili*, Soveria Mannelli 2007, 21–39.

¹⁶ Cf. L. ANTONINI, Introduction, in: *Il traffico dei diritti insaziabili*, cit., 5.

Indeed, not only has it eliminated any differences between men and women that have repercussions that put women in difficulty on the social and work levels, but it is also creating confusion on the cultural and educational levels. Not only that, but because, as MacIntyre says, according to the vision of individualism that *I am what I choose to be*,¹⁷ a total lack of points of reference in building their own sexual identity is creating new areas of fragility in our society. The most recent cases of individuals who committed suicide after sex-change surgery point to the illusion of being able to build an identity on the basis of their subjective self-perception albeit within a society that encourages, supports and applauds the idea of absolute control of individuals over their body.¹⁸ Mere subjective statements are enough in countries like Belgium and the Netherlands – where these incidents have occurred – to legitimise a person's own assisted suicide. They are perfectly in tune with the case provided for of “unbearable mental suffering”. It is done in the full exercise of their freedom and self-determination and with society's most reckless disregard for ethics and law. For fear of violating the autonomy so clumsily protected by the law, it allows individuals to reconstruct their bodies and their lives to self-destruction. It even allows the elimination of those who are frail.

b) The recent reforms in family law, in the wake of the unresponsiveness of legislation to gender differences, are beginning to legitimise new forms of family. These can be seen to have nothing to do with the real concept of family. The roles no longer derive from a stable and indissoluble union and from sexual bipolarity. This has been replaced by affective functions and financially recognised responsibilities that are fragile because they are merely contractual. These are social aggregates which have the alternative of deriving family ties from new and different definitions of marriage or, on the

¹⁷ Cf. A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Univ. Notre Dame Press, 1981.

¹⁸ “*Morire di libertà (e di indifferenza)*”, in: *Il foglio quotidiano*, anno XVIII, n. 233, 3 ottobre 2013, 3.

contrary, from merely living together.¹⁹ The idea of family is being redesigned and redefined to suit personal preference in the wake of a kind of nihilism that considers that it is all the same, all is “cultural” and so everything is transient and subject to change.²⁰

c) Privacy comes from the American legal system where it is intimately connected to the concept of personal liberty and in Europe it is now constantly invoked by the European Court of Human Rights and the supreme courts in Italy.²¹ Mary Ann Glendon explains that it is a right to privacy that is the “quintessence of the right to individual autonomy, the right to self-determination in all matters

¹⁹ Cf. The Italian law of 10.12.2012 no. 219, published in the *Gazzetta ufficiale* of 17.12.2012, on the recognition of children born outside marriage and from incestuous relations.

²⁰ It is interesting how Michael Sandel, in his book *Justice: what is the right thing to do?* (New York 2009), explains the position of the Chief Justice of Massachusetts, Margaret Marshall, in her judgment in a case of marriage between persons of the same sex, “Hillary Goodridge vs. Department of Public Health” (2003). The judge, using the criteria of liberal individualism, made it a matter of autonomy and freedom of choice: to exclude from the institution of marriage same-sex spouses would be incompatible with respect for the autonomy of individuals and equality before the law (and the concept of American privacy). At stake was the right of the individual to make a choice. The same criterion was used in the famous American Supreme Court ruling on the right to abortion “Planned Parenthood vs. Casey” (1992). That considered, Sandel says, if the legislature were to remain really neutral on the moral value of all voluntary intimate relationships, the state would have no reason to limit marriage to only two people contracting it. It would be valid even to consensual polygamous unions. In fact, if the state really wanted to maintain its neutrality and respect any choice made by individuals, maybe it should adopt the solution of not giving any public recognition to marriages, and so implement a de-formalisation (or de-juridification) of marriage (cf. *ibid.*, 284–292).

²¹ We think of the most recent interpretations of the European Court of Human Rights with reference to the “right to private and family life” (art. 8 ECHR) and the more recent judgments of the supreme courts in Italy in the field of heterologous fertilisation when they refer to the “right to privacy of family decisions”. See also: R. DWORKIN, *Life's Dominion: an Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia and Individual Freedom*, New York 1993.

relating to personal, sexual and emotional relationships”.²² In reality, this is not a strong case for its support in our legal system, built on a systematic and personalistic concept of the Constitution and its principles. Nevertheless, the right to privacy is breaking up both the concept of the person as a subject-in-relationships and the family as the primary place for relationships and gendered identities, roles and incarnate presence. One example is the reference to “privacy in family decisions” that was recently used by the judges of the Italian Constitutional Court (judgment no. 162/2014) to remove the ban on heterologous fertilisation put into place in Italy by Law 40/2004. This introduced to our country a family model where the biological parent is structurally absent and the child can be “programmed” without being able to know its origins, merely on the basis of the desire of adults.

d) The fourth area in which we see a strong link between law and subjectivism is that of self-determination, an expression of the right to health and, in particular, of women’s reproductive health, intimately related to privacy. In our legal system, as in most of the systems in legal cultures similar to ours, the isolation of the procreative faculty from the institution of marriage has allowed it to define procreation as an absolutely autonomous and self-referential situation, especially in relation to women. Liberal law is in fact neutral towards social practices that involve moral choices and that are able to bring into play human values, lifestyles and human lives. It has now reduced the procreative capacity to self-referential technomorphic reproductive decisions that are able to transform the ways, times and places of human procreation. At the same time, the refinement of assisted reproduction technology has fostered a new field that explains the relationship between subjective will and life. In the courts, in fact, it is now accepted that there is a link between the right to assisted therapeutic reproduction and the principle of self-determination,

²² M.A. GLENDON, *La visione dignitaria dei diritti sotto assalto*, in: L. ANTONINI (ed.), op. cit., 59–94.

between the right to a healthy child and the right to health of the woman. This creates the conditions for legitimising practices such as pre-implantation diagnosis and the selection of sick embryos in order to recognise the damages liable for unwanted lives and for the violation of their right not to be born.²³

The reduction of decision-making autonomy to being the basis and measure of all things necessarily turns all that underlies this power into an object. Individuals themselves, life, physical integrity, health, and the human subject can legitimately wish for death, expect to have only healthy children by selecting them and choosing them, and ask for medical interventions that are not classified as therapeutic. However, the most paradoxical effect of such a way of proceeding in law is that the legal bases are put in place so that society will leave the weak human subject alone, and leave women alone to deal with the alternatives offered by a market to which they become easy prey.

That is true more than ever in relation to the laws that have occurred over the last fifty years to regulate social practices that are strongly dehumanising and dismantling for coexistence (such as abortion and euthanasia). Moreover, they legitimise practices on the ethical and social levels that deliver the lives of women and their children into the hands of the market. It happens at every stage and in every important situation of life with the medicalisation of the body healthy or ill managed and controlled in its most natural expressions (with contraception, prenatal diagnosis and hedonistic sterilisation). There is also the removal of places and spaces where human dimensions of fragility can be studied (for example, the total absence of spaces that technology takes away from women which they need in order to process the meaning of their suffering due to the discovery of their infertility, or public indifference to women who come to the tragic decision to have an abortion).²⁴

²³ Cf. S. RODOTÀ, *Il diritto di avere diritti*, cit.

²⁴ Cf. *Il cambiamento demografico. Rapporto-proposta sul futuro dell'Italia*, Bari 2011 (ed. Italian Bishops' Conference – Committee for Cultural Projects), 101–115.

How should we consider the close relationship between law and subjectivism? Above all, we are dealing with a nihilistic²⁵ and relativistic²⁶ subjectivism, something that requires an ally in liberal law that is positivist and neutral.²⁷ Libertarian subjectivism considers values to be mere expressions of subjective choices, and it does not admit that they can be part of legislation.²⁸ In order to have legal significance, values have to be transformed into principles, that is, into objective factors that are indispensable when put into play. Meanwhile, in order to ensure any individual purpose, principles and rights must appear neutral, that is, they must be expressed with neutrality with respect to any possible choice.

In this sense, Michael Sandel is right in his critique of Kant and Rawls when he notes that subjectivism and state neutrality go hand in hand, “because we are free and independent selves we need a framework of rights that is neutral among ends, that refuses to take sides in moral and religious controversies, that leaves citizens free to

²⁵ It is paradoxical that in subjectivist and liberalist culture they insist on deleting the clause concerning conscientious objection, the supreme expression of subjectivity and of the intimate and privileged relationship of individuals with themselves, which is the spiritual–cultural and ethical–legal basis of inviolable rights, as such deserving of constitutional protection. See: The Italian Constitutional Court judgment no. 467/1991.

²⁶ Theoretical and practical relativism is “the tolerant face of the nihilistic and materialistic individualism that is at its base” (L. VIOLINI, “*Valori giuridici non negoziabili del diritto pubblico*”, in: *Iustitia*, 1/13, 7–22).

²⁷ As Benedict XVI explained, in both scientific and legal positivism, it is only knowledge that reflects the positivity of the real that can aspire to be the true and only judgment that can ignore an evaluation that is ethically and rationally grounded and legally legitimate. See: A. VON BOGDANDY, S. DELLAVALLE, “*Realtà e trascendenza: una questione non solo religiosa*”, in: M. CARTABIA, A. SIMONCINI (ed.), op. cit., 117.

²⁸ The idea supported by, for example, Zagrebelsky is that principles and values must be kept under control to prevent them becoming absolutes and then tyrants (cf. G. ZAGREBELSKY, *Il diritto mite. Leggi, diritto, giustizia*, Torino 1992, 171). See also: IDEM, “*Diritto per: valori, principi o regole? (A proposito della dottrina dei principi di Ronald Dworkin)*”, in: *Quaderni fiorentini*, n. XXXI, 2002, 872–874.

choose their values for themselves”.²⁹ In this sense, modern liberal thought is built on the idea that justice should remain neutral with respect to the definition of the *good life*.

It is the idea whereby it is possible to identify criteria of justice in an antecedent and independent way with respect to that which we feel is good, whereby the just is neutral and has priority over the good, and where rights serve only to protect individual purposes.³⁰ Everything depends on a systematic avoidance of the dimension of belonging to human co-existence and to an order of reality that prudent legislators identified in principles and values, and that today is continually ignored by a ‘free law’ that is proving to be a factor of disintegration and legislative and social uncertainty. It does not take into account the value of the social bond³¹ or of the nature of human beings as relational beings.³² However, the conviction that human beings are self-sufficient and alone is an illusion of modernity. The truth is that we originate from a relationship and we come to the world through another person, and therefore we can only live with and move towards others in order to live out our existence. Self-sufficient individuals are actually renouncing themselves and their freedom. As they are not able to open up to the other, they become prisoners of themselves and of the narrow confines of their souls. Similarly, the pragmatism that brings justice to continuous compromises that are seemingly balanced and realistic between individual interests becomes a common evil

²⁹ M. SANDEL, *Justice. What is the right thing to do?* New York 2009, 216.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³¹ Cf. M. SANDEL, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge 1998.

³² “It would be a disaster if today’s European culture could only conceive freedom as absence of obligation” (BENEDICT XVI, *To the world of culture*, Paris, Collège des Bernardins, 12 September 2008). “Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself” (IDEM, *Address to the German Bundestag in Berlin*, 22 September 2011).

whenever it involves agreements that are detrimental to the “truth of things” as Aristotle demonstrated and the truth about the human person.

Yet, we women know well that there are negotiable goods and non-negotiable goods,³³ dimensions of our identity and our life of relationships that are not exchangeable goods or marketable products. The value of human life since its inception, the protection of the family based on marriage between a man and a woman the natural and universal place where identity is structured and the education of children and care of all human creatures are human and legal values that are non-negotiable and have been entrusted to us.³⁴ To protect them, we must learn to find the meaning of human fragility and the meaning of suffering for our unfulfilled desires. We must be able to show our children clear values for they are powerful dimensions of identity. We must be able to explain that in addition to the right there is also the good, and that what is really “good for me” is good in itself, the “truth of things” that we must never cease trying to find.

³³ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, 2002. More recently: BENEDICT XVI, *Address to participants in the meeting organised by the Christian/Centrist Democrat International*, 22 September 2012.

³⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

II.2. Principles to be safeguarded in the *humanum*

Nature and human identity: concepts to be recovered? A pastoral perspective

GILFREDO MARENGO*

We may be asked where the requirement arose to defend, reinforce and appreciate the categories of 'nature' and 'identity' from a purely anthropological point of view, to take just one example. The answer is clearly that both seem to be very useful, if not indispensable, in making a stand with regard to the culture and practices of the world today where the *humanum* is at the centre of controversy, as we were told by John Paul II.¹

It is agreed that this represents one of the most characteristic aspects of all his teaching that was, not by chance, inaugurated by the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*.²

It is worth remembering the process through which the anthropological question gradually assumed a peculiar centrality for Karol Wojtyła, not only at a reflective level, but even more so in a specific pastoral framework.

He himself reported as decisive for his own training one particular fact: the discovery of the centrality of this issue in the cultural context of the post-war era, with particular reference to the confrontation

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¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Al venerato fratello mons. Angelo Scola in occasione dell'apertura del nuovo Anno accademico*, 7 November 1996.

² Cf. G. MARENGO, *Giovanni Paolo II e il Concilio*, Siena 2011, 15–47, with bibliography.

with the form of modern thought that was represented by Marxist ideology in Poland in the nineteen fifties and sixties.

It is interesting to record that Pope John Paul II himself wanted to retrace the start and development of his special interest in anthropological issues.³ In doing so, he recalls being surprised at how the theme of man represented for the Polish Marxist culture after World War II the focus and consequently the privileged area for polemic confrontation with non-Marxist and, especially, Christian thought.⁴ In this regard, he mentions the special importance in this debate that was given to his essay *Person and Act*⁵ that came to light at the end of a long period of reflection. The Pope hastened to add that it originated with a passion for the human that had grown to the extent of being a decisive element in maturing his priestly vocation and pastoral ministry. He allowed himself to be challenged by young people's questions that were not on theoretical issues, but that were specific questions about life.⁶ These gave birth to the book *Love and Responsibility*⁷ and then the more systematically challenging *Person and Act*.

These elements show the practical nature of the special attention Karol Wojtyła gave to the anthropological question. At the same time, they explain his strong insistence on the process of formulating the Vatican II Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. He not only wanted this document to intervene explicitly 'against' Marxist ideology, but it had to show how a clear pastoral perspective like that of the Christian faith is able to give true convincing answers to specific questions of human life that were being falsified by ideologies.⁸

³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, New York 2005.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵ K. WOJTYŁA, *Person and Act*. Translated into English as *The Acting Person* by Andrzej Potocki in 1979.

⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, op. cit.

⁷ K. WOJTYŁA, *Love and Responsibility*, London 1981.

⁸ Cf. G. TURBANTI, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno: la redazione della costituzione pastorale "Gaudium et Spes" del Vaticano II*, Bologna 2000, 510–511. This prob-

It is to be assumed that this kind of anthropological sensitivity, widely documented in the bishop's activities in Krakow,⁹ would be the background to the way in which John Paul II, at the very beginning of his pontificate, would develop the central part of *Redemptor Hominis* and, consequently, its most significant aspect in terms of innovation and originality. John Paul II raised the question again, already present in Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam* (on the courses of action to be followed by the Church), and began his encyclical with an explicit Christological focus: Christ is the "way" (no. 7). This emphasis acquires a special anthropological connotation in the text when it concludes that the human being "is the primary route that the Church must travel" (no. 14).

These quick references to the teaching of John Paul II, which must be recognised as having a special role in placing the anthropological question at the centre of the life of the Church, can provide a framework for our reflection on nature and identity. One can well understand that it cannot be done from an apologetics perspective that defends the concept of the human being as expressed, developed and disseminated by the Christian faith and culture in the world. Today it appears to be put under discussion. Furthermore, it is deliberately fought against and considered obsolete and even accused of being an enemy of human life and of people's happiness.

We can appreciate that this, although certainly legitimate and necessary, must be articulated with a broader and more positive intent.

ably explains the reason for his proposals in the drafting of the conciliar constitution to put the spotlight on the value of salvation history 'presence' of the Church in the world and how it is at the service of the vocation of humanity (*ibid.*). For more about his role in Vatican II see: *Karol Wojtyła: uno stile conciliare. Gli interventi di K. Wojtyła al Concilio Vaticano II*, ed. G. Richi Alberti, Venezia 2012.

⁹ Cf. K. WOJTYŁA, *Alle fonti del rinnovamento. Studio sull'attuazione del Concilio Vaticano Secondo*, ed. F. FELICE, Soveria Mannelli 2007 (first Polish edition: Krakow 1972), 9–193.

We must give the reasons for the Christian approach to humanity where the entirety of a person is important and people are shown the way to find themselves and fulfil themselves.

If we look at the *status quaestionis* of the issue, we see that there are two sets of questions to be examined carefully.

First of all, we must take a look at the conditions of humanity today with their current cultural and practical aspects in order to identify whether and under what conditions the issues we are speaking of can be used to respond to the most problematic issues and misunderstandings.

Secondly, we must verify that the recovery of this nature and identity can be an active element in the recovery of a concept of humanity that will safeguard and foster well-grounded and positive human beings.

The apparent linearity of the path traced so far should not deceive. The issues involved are complex to say the least, especially because of a series of twists and factors that combine to make this one of the most debated and intricate issues in the life of the Church and in theology for at least two centuries.

We must not forget that all of this enters into the complex history of the relationship between the Church and the world as it is configured in modernity. It developed in a particular way after Vatican II and throughout the fifty years since that significant event in the life of Church of our time.¹⁰

¹⁰ Cf. G. TURBANTI, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno*, op. cit.; J. RATZINGER, *Problemi e risultati del Concilio Vaticano II*, Brescia 1967, 109–113; G. COLOMBO, “La teologia della *Gaudium et Spes* e l’esercizio del magistero ecclesiastico”, in: IDEM., *La ragione teologica*, Milano 1995, 265–303, 281–284; A. SCOLA, “*Gaudium et spes: dialogo e discernimento nella testimonianza della verità*”, in: R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione ed attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, Cinisello Balsamo 2000, 82–114; J.A. KOMONCHAK, “Le valutazioni sulla *Gaudium et spes: Chenu, Dossetti, Ratzinger*”, in: *Volti di fine Concilio. Studi di storia e teologia sulla conclusione del Vaticano II*, ed. J. DORÉ – A. MELLONI, Bologna 2000, 115–153; G. RUGGIERI, *Delusioni alla fine del Concilio. Qualche atteggiamento nell’ambiente cattolico francese*, ivi, 193–224; V. DE CICCO – A. SCARANO, “La recezione della *Gaudium et spes*”, in: *Asprenas* 50 (2003), 135–170; M. VERGOTTINI – G. TURBANTI – F. SCANZIANI – D.

It is well known that the Council went to the heart of the anthropological question that was asking to be resolved through a renewed interpretation of the relations between the ecclesial community and the contemporary world. Justification for this came from the peculiar “anthropocentrism” of modernity and the recognition that Catholic thought was not always able to express the full picture in order to explain the certainty of faith for which “only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light”.¹¹

It is worth looking back at Paul VI’s words on closing the Council: “the teaching authority of the Church, even though not wishing to issue extraordinary dogmatic pronouncements, has made thoroughly known its authoritative teaching on a number of questions which today weigh upon man’s conscience and activity, descending, so to speak, into a dialogue with him, but ever preserving its own authority and force; it has spoken with the accommodating friendly voice of pastoral

TETTAMANZI, *40 anni dalla Gaudium et spes. Un’eredità da onorare*, Milano 2005; G. COLZANI, “A quarant’anni dalla Gaudium et spes. La legge di ogni evangelizzazione”, in: *Rivista di Scienze Religiose* 19 (2005), 437–468; P. GOMARASCA, *La condizione dell’uomo nel mondo contemporaneo. Nuovi scenari a quarant’anni dalla Gaudium et Spes*, ivi, 421–426; “Futuro mancato di un documento rivoluzionario? A quarant’anni dalla Gaudium et Spes”, monograph issue of *Salesianum* 68 (2006) n° 3, 421–546; J. JOBLIN, “L’Église dans le monde. Actualité de la constitution pastorale Gaudium et spes”, in: *Gregorianum*, 87 (2006), 580–596; “A quarant’anni dalla Gaudium et spes” (ed. G. TRENTIN), monograph issue of *Studia Patavina*, 53 (2006) n° 3, 37–106; G. TRABUCCO – M. VERGOTTINI, “Il Concilio Vaticano II e il nuovo corso della teologia”, in: G. ANGELINI – S. MACCHI (ed.), *La teologia del Novecento. Momenti maggiori e questioni aperte* (Lectio 7), Milano 2008, 297–377; G. JOBIN, “Gaudium et spes dans le monde—« vécu » de ce temps: réflexions épistémologique sur l’herméneutique de la constitution pastorale”, in: P. BORDEYNE ET L. VILLEMEN, (sous la direction de), *Vatican II et la théologie*, Paris 2006, 177–201; G. MARENGO, “Gaudium et spes: la pastorality alla prova”, in: AA.VV., *Rileggere il Concilio. Storici e teologi a confronto*, Roma 2012, 249–293; G. TRABUCCO, “Quale paradigma del Concilio. Teologico? Antropologico? Ecclesiologico?”, in: *Teologia* 38 (2013), 454–475.

¹¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

charity; its desire has been to be heard and understood by everyone; it has not merely concentrated on intellectual understanding but has also sought to express itself in simple, up-to-date, conversational style, derived from actual experience and a cordial approach which make it more vital, attractive and persuasive; it has spoken to modern man as he is. Another point we must stress is this: all this rich teaching is channeled in one direction, the service of mankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need. The Church has, so to say, declared herself the servant of humanity, at the very time when her teaching role and her pastoral government have, by reason of the council's solemnity, assumed greater splendor and vigor: the idea of service has been central. [...] Any careful observer of the council's prevailing interest for human and temporal values cannot deny that it is from the pastoral character that the council has virtually made its program, and must recognize that the same interest is never divorced from the most genuine religious interest, whether by reason of charity, its sole inspiration (where charity is, God is!), or the council's constant, explicit attempts to link human and temporal values with those that are specifically spiritual, religious and everlasting; its concern is with man and with earth, but it rises to the kingdom of God. [...] our humanism becomes Christianity, our Christianity becomes centered on God; in such sort that we may say, to put it differently: knowledge of man is a prerequisite for knowledge of God. Would not this council, then, which has concentrated principally on man, be destined to propose again to the world of today the ladder leading to freedom and consolation? Would it not be, in short, a simple, new and solemn teaching to love man in order to love God? To love man, we say, not as a means but as the first step toward the final and transcendent goal which is the basis and cause of every love. And so this council can be summed up in its ultimate religious meaning, which is none other than a pressing and friendly invitation to mankind of today to rediscover in fraternal love the God 'to turn away from whom is to fall, to turn to whom is to rise again, to remain in whom is to be secure... to return to

whom is to be born again, in whom to dwell is to live' (St. Augustine, *Solil.* I, 1, 3; PL 32, 870)".¹²

Certain reservations were expressed regarding the way in which Vatican II sought to deal with the issue of the presence of the Church in the contemporary world. Several reported that the attitude was perhaps too optimistic, belied by the historical climate of the nineteen sixties. To this we should attribute the fragility with which Christian communities related to the great ideological narratives of the twentieth century and the complexities that are being dealt with now in the early part of the third millennium.

To a perspective on modernity that was made by the Council in a not entirely satisfactory way, we could add the difficulty in finding in its teachings the right tools for a fruitful conversation with the complex and elusive post-modern.

From this point of view, it is useful to remember that the appearance of innovation in Vatican II was succinctly designated through the use of the categories of pastorality, updating and signs of the times. These were given a central role by John XXIII, and then Paul VI actively adopted them when introducing the specific focus of the dialogue. Together they converge to identify the primary intent of the Council to be a radical rethinking of the way in which the Church must relate to the world and contemporary society.

The trajectory assigned to the Council seemed to take up the sharp provocation issued by Hans Urs von Balthasar in the nineteen fifties to "tear down the ramparts".¹³ It is hard not to come across this emphasis in the intense years of the Council. It was sometimes taken with great enthusiasm, in other cases strongly contested, yet in the end it was painstakingly pursued.

¹² PAUL VI, Address at the last general meeting of the Second Vatican Council, 7 December 1965.

¹³ H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Razing the Bastions*, San Francisco 1993 (First published in German in 1952). The relevance of this perspective was remembered in the years after the Council as a "long-overdue task" (J. RATZINGER, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, San Francisco 1987, 391).

Some people wondered if this type of sensitivity is still able to find fruitful echoes in the fabric of the Christian communities. Not infrequently those accents were felt to be sometimes outdated, perhaps admired, but distant from the current context.

First of all, the hardships experienced by the post-conciliar Church were in varying degrees attributed precisely to that attitude of open dialogue that marked the Vatican II era. Sometimes a certain distance from that impression is needed so that the ecclesial community can find the reasons and the capability to effectively overcome the elements of crisis that mark their lives. Rather than widen its outreach, it would seem that the Church today should be more concerned about caring for its inner life and identity, and be more attentive to self-care than to taking on the complex arena of the surrounding world.

At the same time, we must not forget that the modern world has changed profoundly in the past fifty years. In its complexity, which is often tragic, it does not seem to take into consideration the will for dialogue on the part of Christians. Indeed, it seems to move in directions that accentuate a certain distance if not explicit conflict with Christian feeling. There is no lack of open hostility and, especially, of intolerance whenever the Church steps outside the borders of the tedious politically correct and is not afraid to point to the Lord's one purpose to bring salvation.

It is safe to assume that all of these elements may favour, sometimes unconsciously, a journey that means an inevitable raising of the ramparts. Factors that appear to push in this direction are the pervasiveness of a worldly mentality even in the Church today, the acute difficulties in understanding the terms of the obvious difficulties between civilisations taking place under the eyes of all, and confusion and internal weakness among the Christian communities. The spread of strong hints of "anti-modern" controversy in some sectors of the Church, often successfully, presents itself as a symptom of some importance. It is not uncommon to detect the hope that – as in the past – preference be given to a rigorous and doctrinally flawless distance from the mistakes of the world. It should follow a set (equally

rigorous) of operational guidelines and ethics in order to preserve the faithful from all worldly contamination and to keep them in a morally virtuous way of life.

In more recent years we have seen a painfully surprising growth in misunderstandings and questioning of many fundamental elements in the understanding of humanity. A culture of Christian tradition now forgotten and also a balanced humanism, variously religious, are accused of negating any element of objectivity in human existence, thus handing it over to the mere arbitrariness of subjectivism – a “self-experiment” (Peter Sloterdijk).

Given these events, categories such as “identity” and “nature” appear as necessary bulwarks to safeguard the heart of an objective point of anthropology, according to a two-fold purpose: to draw a line of demarcation that can isolate those anthropological factors felt to be important and to find a space for possible dialogue with cultures including those distant from the Christian faith but that are – in some way – respectful of a shared rationality.

It is difficult not to agree with these. They ask, however, precisely in order that they may be adopted with all the commitment they deserve, that they be somewhat clarified and, although both are more intrinsically connected than ever, that it would be best to examine them separately.

It may be useful to recall that in the context of the complex debate related to the publication of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*,¹⁴ the magisterium of the Church clarified the significance and importance with which the magisterium itself considers it relevant to assist in

¹⁴ The literature is vast. Some references are: *Introduzione all'enciclica Humanae vitae, da "Notificationes" e Curia metropolitana Cracoviensi A.D. 1969* [Ianuarius– Aprilis] N. 1–4, Città del Vaticano 1969; G.B. GUZZETTI, “*La Humanae vitae nei suoi commentari*”, in: *La Scuola Cattolica*, Suppl. bibl. 98 (1969), 179–224; D. TETTAMANZI, “*La Humanae vitae nel decennio 1968–1978. Continuità di magistero e riflessione teologica*”, in: *La Scuola Cattolica* 107 (1979), 3–61; J.E. SMITH, *Humanae vitae. A generation later*, Washington D.C. 1991; A. SCOLA – L. MELINA, “*Profezia del mistero nuziale. Tesi sull'insegnamento dell'Humanae vitae*”, in: *Anthropotes* XIV/2 (1998), 155–172.

the interpretation of human nature and natural law, according to the formula that sees a necessary connection between these matters and the deposit of faith.¹⁵

Without detracting from the authority of such a stance, it is quite clear that they do not exhaust the wealth of anthropological reflection of the Church, as the same encyclical makes quite clear¹⁶ and especially as can be seen from the intense and original effort of John Paul II to give to the teachings of Paul VI a broad foundation of theological anthropology.¹⁷

To take circumstances much closer to us, it is worth drawing attention to the important address given by Benedict XVI in December 2012. In the traditional speech to the Roman Curia to convey Christmas greetings, the Pope delivered a broad reflection on the family and the problems related to the calling into question of the objectivity of sexual distinction, against the background of gender theory. Especially striking are the words with which he synthetically

¹⁵ “This kind of question requires from the teaching authority of the Church a new and deeper reflection on the principles of the moral teaching on marriage – a teaching which is based on the natural law as illuminated and enriched by divine Revelation. No member of the faithful could possibly deny that the Church is competent in her magisterium to interpret the natural moral law. It is in fact indisputable, as Our predecessors have many times declared, that Jesus Christ, when He communicated His divine power to Peter and the other Apostles and sent them to teach all nations His commandments, constituted them as the authentic guardians and interpreters of the whole moral law, not only, that is, of the law of the Gospel but also of the natural law. For the natural law, too, declares the will of God, and its faithful observance is necessary for men’s eternal salvation. In carrying out this mandate, the Church has always issued appropriate documents on the nature of marriage, the correct use of conjugal rights, and the duties of spouses” (PAUL VI, Encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, no. 4).

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.* nos.7–9.

¹⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *L'amore umano nel piano divino. La redenzione del corpo e la sacramentalità del matrimonio nelle catechesi del mercoledì* (1979–1984), ed. G. MARENGO, Roma 2009, and IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* in particular nos. 28–35; K. WOJTYŁA, “*La visione antropologica della Humanae vitae*”, in: *Lateranum* 44 (1978), 125–145.

speaks of the judgment of faith on these issues: “When the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God, as the image of God at the core of his being. The defence of the family is about man himself. And it becomes clear that when God is denied, human dignity also disappears. Whoever defends God is defending man”.¹⁸

We have already referred to the biblical account of the creation of the first man and woman. This reading is strongly advocated as a fundamental key to a correct anthropology of man and woman. We can conclude that it is impossible to adequately capture the dignity of human existence outside a clear theological perspective.

On the same occasion, Benedict XVI decided to emphasise the centrality of the well-known “values recognised as fundamental and non-negotiable for the human condition”. Interestingly, the next context in which this is said deals with “dialogue with states, dialogue with society”.¹⁹ One can easily understand that these values cannot be construed as exhaustive of the Christian life of human beings. They express some strong features of Christian anthropology, the part of it that can be accepted and adopted by a culture that undertakes open dialogue that does not rule out an experience of faith, supported by intelligent rationality.

If we understand well the meaning of this papal intervention, it is quite out of place for the reservations some have sought to raise against Pope Francis concerning his interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, when he said, “we cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I have not spoken much about these things, and I was reprimanded for that. But when we speak about these issues, we have to talk about them in a context. The teaching of the Church, for that

¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Roman Curia, 21 December 2012.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

matter, is clear and I am a son of the Church, but it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time”.²⁰

It is in fact, without detracting from the value of the public arena for the Church in the world, a case of avoiding the possibility, even unconsciously, of reducing the content of the proclamation and Christian witness to these “non-negotiable values”. This does not deny their importance and their social, cultural and political objectives.

It seems somewhat preposterous to want to see in these words of the Pope any distancing from his predecessors. If anything they interact dialectically with those cultural environments that have been in danger of reducing the papal magisterium of the last decades to demands of new intransigence, more easily expendable in certain cultural and political debates, especially in English-speaking environments.

In light of these considerations, we must concede to the categories of nature and identity the task of preserving a strong profile, objectively recognisable, of the concept of the human being that belongs to the Christian faith.

At the same time, we must not forget that the original contribution made by revelation to the understanding of human existence is able to demonstrate its universal relevance, and therefore its profile of truth, from the inescapable reference to the event of Jesus Christ, Son of God who became human like us and reveals full humanity to humanity.

From this point of view, the recovery of the above categories is the responsibility of theological reflection on humanity to the extent that it may be useful to support and to further develop its specific content, without the power or duty to exhaust it.

If we go on to assess how these same categories may represent a suitable tool for dialogue with contemporary anthropological culture, many difficulties emerge. There is a decisive gap between the theoretical perspective on the use of nature and identity in much

²⁰ A. SPADARO, “A big heart open to God: The exclusive interview with Pope Francis”, in: *America Magazine*, 30 September 2013.

theological reflection (closely connected with classical philosophical thought) and a post-modern understanding of humanity.

By virtue of this distance, the call to agree on a common area of rationality seems to run the risk of having no dialogue partner. Paradoxically, the very starting point of the dialogue is where the foundations are laid to establish in some way the impossibility of its execution.

The fragility of this path seems to be significantly documented by some recovery in certain sectors of the Church of an attitude of condemnation against the present world. This is an approach that Vatican II intended to take leave behind without reserve. It wanted to abandon a deprecatory attitude towards the evils of contemporary society, to go beyond a simple statement of true doctrines, and to show through a method of argument the relevance of these truths in their reasonableness to the life of every person.

Indeed, the specific make-up of the Council was reflected in the effort to develop a teaching with a pastoral quality that was intended to point to a perspective that could not be reduced either to the institutional moment of the ecclesial body nor to that of a more convincing theological edifice.

The current circumstances in which it seems that the Church encounters many obstacles in dealing with public authorities and with the ability of a pervasive dominant mentality, certainly distant if not hostile, can be read as a provocation to regain its original profile as witness and prophet, according to the successful synthesis in these words by Paul VI: “If we are to embody the spirit of the Council, apostles and prophets must be born”.²¹

Pope Francis seemed to be moving in this direction when, in addressing CELAM on 28 July 2013 during his visit to Brazil, he pointed to the way of “pastoral conversion”.²² It appears to be an approach to pastorality that not only frees it from a functionalist

²¹ J. GUITTON, *Dialoghi con Paolo VI*, Milano 1967, 262.

²² Cf. A. SPADARO, *Il disegno di papa Francesco*, Bologna 2013.

perspective of care of souls, guaranteed in any case, but it seems to reconnect with the more original aspect of Vatican II by focusing on “attitudes and a reform of life”.

The Pontiff’s intention was to issue a warning about the temptations that can impede a path of pastoral conversion. He named them as the ideologising of the Gospel message, functionalism and clericalism. Pope Francis also said, “concerning pastoral conversion, I would like to recall that ‘pastoral care’ is nothing other than the exercise of the Church’s motherhood. She gives birth, suckles, gives growth, corrects, nourishes and leads by the hand ... So we need a Church capable of rediscovering the maternal womb of mercy. Without mercy we have little chance nowadays of becoming part of a world of ‘wounded’ persons in need of understanding, forgiveness, love”.²³

In the open space between the poles of the temptations and the mother figure of pastoral ministry there seems to be room for renewed and fruitful interest in the anthropological question. Attention to the triple temptation can allow us to isolate at least some of the reasons why, despite the impressive heritage of teaching today owned by the Church, it has not always been able to develop its full potential in a fruitful way. Instead, the reference to “maternal womb of mercy” inclines us to regret and condemnation in view of the serious harm that family life is suffering in our time, almost returning to the famous words of John XXIII: “we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life.

They behave as though at the time of former Councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life and for proper religious liberty. We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always

²³ POPE FRANCIS, Address to the bishops of Brazil, 27 July 2013.

forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand [...] Nowadays however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations”.²⁴

The fact that in this historical climate Pope Francis is urging Christian communities to be present everywhere with all that is human and to witness and share the drama of existence of every person, not only expresses close identification with the best of the heritage of Vatican II, but even more almost manifests a new ‘beginning’. It is happening in circumstances that are certainly more complex and dramatic, but they are equally full of provocation to the vocation and mission of every Christian.

²⁴ JOHN XXIII, Opening speech at the Second Vatican Council, 11 October 1962. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/vatican2.htm>

Sexual difference and the concept of person

GIORGIA SALATIELLO*

The goal of this talk is to see whether it is possible to arrive at a reformulation of the title by replacing “and” with “in”. In that way it would no longer be a simple juxtaposition of the concepts of sexual difference and person. Instead, it would identify an intrinsic relationship between them that makes them inseparable.

To move in this direction, it will first be necessary to examine the concept of person in order to delimit the scope of the survey. We must make it clear that it only focuses on the human being. Sexual difference, as such, also pertains to infrahuman existence.

Only later can we consider sexual difference and analyse it according to the distinctive features that derive from its reference to the person, after we have highlighted the essential traits.

In the third and final step, on the basis of the results achieved, we shall indicate additional perspectives that will give us possible avenues for research.

THE CONCEPT OF PERSON

To clarify the concept of person, it is appropriate to start from two definitions that we already have with the purpose of analysing and highlighting the essential dimensions.

The first is Thomas Aquinas’ ‘classic’ which states that “‘person’ signifies what is most perfect in all nature, that is, a subsistent individual of a rational nature”,¹ while the second one, by Emerich

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Coreth, says that “‘person’ is the essential human unity of body and spirit as individual being—oneself which is implemented in conscious self—possession and free self—availability”.²

Thomas Aquinas’ definition is particularly suited to opening the field to research because it highlights that a person is the most perfect entity that exists, and this leads immediately to an investigation of reality and the meaning of the rational nature that sets humans apart. On the other hand, Coreth’s definition introduces a series of concepts, some very familiar, others less so, which in turn need to be studied further in order to grasp the scope and implications regarding the being of a person.

If we proceed from Thomas Aquinas’ definition, the emphasis on rational nature leads initially to our taking intellectual capacity into account. It is, after all, referred to by the other definition when it speaks of conscious self—possession.

Intellectual knowledge is the first dimension to which we draw attention. This is also because of the undeniable fact that it is present in every human act. Even the simplest actions of daily life require us to know with what we are dealing.

At the base of knowledge there is a clear perception that provides the first content on which to build. However, in the human sphere, the perceptive level is penetrated by the intellectual dimension. When something presents itself to the senses, a person can say what it is or can ascribe a concept to it.

Concepts, unlike feelings, are not passively received. They are a spontaneous production of intelligence and are evidently intangible and universal. That means that they do not refer exclusively to the single material thing that is perceived.

¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I Pars, q. 29, a. 3, c.: “*persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura*”.

² E. CORETH, *Antropologia filosofica*, Brescia 1978, 149.

Furthermore, thought does not cease producing concepts. It continues making judgments with which it affirms that a thing is an entity located in the unlimited vastness of being. Being is therefore the scope of thought that is not bound by any particular region of entities.

It should finally be noted that this process does not have inherent limitations because individual judgments can be connected in a discursive way. This produces knowledge that is capable of never stopping and that reaches out to more and more acquisitions.

The intangible nature of the concepts leads us with full consistency to affirm the identical intangibility of whoever produces them. Moreover, the opening up of thought to being shows that it contains something of the infinite, even though this pertains to a finite subject.

All of this, without any undue addition, can therefore be reformulated in the affirmation of the spirituality of the human subject who has an intrinsic intangible dimension and is infinitely open beyond all extrinsically limiting conditioning.

* * *

Coreth's definition, noted earlier, puts free self-availability beside conscious self-possession. Moreover, the rational nature spoken of by Thomas Aquinas does not only imply intellectual knowledge, but it has a more extensive meaning. For these reasons, the intent to grasp the reality of the person must lead us now to look at the freedom of the human being.

If we wish to highlight the essence of freedom, we cannot start out with an analysis of individual choices and free decisions. It is necessary to arrive at whatever is their condition of possibility, or the fundamental freedom by which a person is entrusted to him/herself and, being subject to many forms of conditioning, is not determined in an absolute manner either by external or by internal forces.

On the other hand, this constitutive freedom has already emerged regarding the intellect which is not bound by any particular object and can always proceed beyond the sum of knowledge in a perspective of unlimited being.

An analysis of freedom requires immediate focus on the will which is the tendency that accompanies intellectual knowledge as well as the instinct for sensitivity. The radical difference between the two will immediately emerge since the will is not limited in its aim by any specific purpose. It tends to absolute good as presented to it by the intellect.

A person, however, exists in a world surrounded only by limited and finite goods. Therefore, none of these is really an object of the will, and so it remains indefinite and therefore free.

Freedom, however, is not primarily the right to choose between external objects and purposes. It is, above all, the ability to freely dispose of oneself by projecting one's own existence by means of individual decisions that are subsequently taken and by implementing in an increasingly explicit way that which is the original nature of the person.

At the theoretical level, attempts have frequently been made to deny freedom and to declare that the human being is also strictly subject to the determinism of nature. However, this view is a pure abstraction that is ignoring an experience that cannot be eliminated, that of being free and responsible for one's actions.

In this way, free will, like the intellect, is revealed to be a transcendent faculty. This is because it is removed from material norms, but, also in this case, as it aims for the absolute good, transcendence is equivalent to spirituality and this spirituality characterises human subjects who exist freely and are called to be fulfilled in accordance with their nature.

* * *

The examination of intellectual knowledge and free will has brought about emphasis being placed on the spirituality of the human being. However, in reality, its deepest and most obvious manifestation has not yet been highlighted.

We are referring to self-awareness, or the perception that accompanies every act and allows individuals to accept themselves together with what they know and with objects desired in freedom and responsibility.³

Obviously we do not mean here explicit self-awareness with which a person returns discursively on actions and understands that they belong to the person who implemented them and is, therefore, the origin. We want to focus attention on the implicit reflexive awareness for which all people, knowing the world and acting in it, are always present to themselves and capable of saying “I”, without this implying any themed conceptualisation.⁴

This is an original experience that allows one to own oneself without being dispersed or confused with all that is not oneself. We can definitely speak of self-transparency, albeit imperfect and incomplete, but which, however, is always mediated by meeting with the surrounding reality.

This reveals the most radical difference between a person and the rest of existence, and the most indubitable sign of spirituality. It is precisely that openness that allows us to know and want to a limitless extent that is the same as that which, by bringing one back to oneself (the Thomist “*reditio completa*”), allows for the existence of a specific dimension of interiority, one that is precisely the opposite of the unconscious and unreflective closure of all that is only matter.⁵

* * *

All of the above considerations have led us to identify in the person the presence of a principle distinct from matter – the spirit. The task that is now proposed, always starting from the initial definitions and, in this case, in a particular way from Coreth’s, is to grasp its nature more precisely and investigate its relationship with the body.

³ Cf. G. SALATELLO, *L'autocoscienza come riflessione originaria del soggetto su di sé in San Tommaso d'Aquino*, Roma 1996.

⁴ Cf. K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York 1982.

⁵ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 1, a. 9, c. 150.

First of all, it must be emphasised that the access road to the reality of the spirit is not that of abstract demonstration.

It is that of actual experience that attests that human beings are subjects, as we noted earlier, of conscious acts, of intelligence and free will that are irreducible to matter and that undoubtedly pertain to them.⁶

The spirit, then, is the ultimate principle of such acts and its existence cannot be denied without making everyone's experience of this appear inexplicable and absurd.

It is apparent that, by setting the question in these terms, the spirit cannot be understood as a "part" alongside others, but it must be understood as the foundation of all that is properly human in existence.

On the other hand, self-awareness is not only related to intellectual activity and will but it embraces every sphere of existence. Therefore we can say that existence is radically penetrated by the spirit which is, therefore, the deepest core of human beings. It essentially characterises them with respect to all other entities and constitutes that which tradition has long designated as the soul.

Here we fully understand the meaning of the classic expression which emphasises that the soul is *forma corporis* and not only of intellect and will. Now we must look more closely at the nature of this relationship between spirit and body.

It is the reference to the soul as form of body that provides the only strictly correct way to access understanding of their relationship which, as we have already mentioned, is not one between juxtaposed parties, but is of intimate interpenetration.

Only the presence of the spiritual soul makes of matter a human body. It unifies all the functions of the vegetative and sensitive life in view of the higher level of the spirit. This, moreover, being a finite

⁶ "The spirit is given in an original way as a genuine and unbreakable essence in a transcendental experience, in which the human being experiences him/herself as one entity, spiritual and corporeal" (K. RAHNER, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem, Quaestiones Disputatae* 13, New York 1965, 52–53).

spirit, cannot dispense with the materiality of the body for the exercise of its conscious acts with intelligence and free will.

It is only thanks to the soul that the body is a unit in which the different dimensions are organised from an inner centre that itself informs every manifestation and every activity. Therefore a human being is not pure feeling, for it is always penetrated by spirituality which works in the human body that it is never dead ugly matter.

The spiritual soul, then, is the unifying principle of the body that moreover, for the same reason, is not extrinsic to the soul. It is the means of activity and expression. This shows the unsustainability of all attempts to impose dualistic opposition between soul and body, as well as those of reductionists who try to give reasons for human reality that ignore one of its metaphysically constitutive dimensions.

* * *

With the definitions we gave initially as our starting point, the considerations made so far have allowed us to arrive at an understanding of what is implied by the concept of person, or the essence of personal existence. However, a crucial aspect remains to be investigated without which the framework outlined would be totally incomplete.

A person does not exist in isolation or in a world of only objects, but is involved in a web of relationships without which human life would be radically impossible, not only in terms of survival, but, even more so, in terms of meaning.

Contemporary thought gives particular and justified attention to the theme of intersubjectivity. It emphasises that a person can be fulfilled only through meeting others and dialogue. Here they are not dealing with things but with another human being with the same openness and the same worth.

This raises a problem of primary importance which requires a precise response in order to avoid misinterpreting the meaning of what is meant by the concept of person. Is it the relationship with another human subject that constitutes a person, or, on the contrary,

does relationship presuppose that those who are involved are already people, precisely to give them their distinctive composition?

The second possibility is that which accounts for human reality. It has in itself, as we have seen, in its metaphysical constitution, the reason for its absolute uniqueness compared to all other things that exist. Interpersonal relationships are such only because in it the subject does not relate to an object, but to another subject who is equal.⁷

Having clarified this crucial point, also rich in ethical implications with regard to all those people who cannot enter into meaningful relationships with others, there is no doubt that an “I” can fully express him/herself only by relating to a “you”. The “you” has the same self-awareness, and this allows for the complete implementation of all the spiritual capacity of human essence.

Consequently, only a full understanding of what it means to be a person can allow us to establish relationships that are fully adequate and capable of enhancing the rational nature that Thomas Aquinas pointed out as being the maximum perfection of a finite existence.

* * *

To conclude these reflections on the concept of person, we must clarify that, while it falls outside the scope of this research, it is, however, of paramount importance in order to avoid misunderstandings of considerable gravity.

We have seen that the person is revealed in acts of intelligence and freedom, and, ultimately, in self-awareness. However, this should not be misunderstood to mean that such acts and such awareness are those that constitute the person because, if it were so, there would be no connection between “unique human being” and “person”, as the latter term would have to be reserved for those who reach fulfilment of the abilities given with rational nature.

On the contrary, it is possession of the capabilities and not their exercise that makes a person and this possession is nothing but the

⁷ Cf. J. DE FINANCE, *A tu per tu con l'altro. Saggio sull'alterità*, Roma 2004.

same rational nature that distinguishes the human species from all others.⁸

Here we return to what we have said about interpersonal relationship which is the privileged place for the manifestation of the person. The value and dignity of the human being does not come from what they can do, but from what is originally inherent to their metaphysically constituted structure.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

We have just been returning the concept of person to its metaphysical foundation and consequently, in order to relate it to sexual difference, we need to see if the latter is situated at the same level. Otherwise, it would not be possible for a unitary consideration of both.⁹

This consideration is radically precluded by two opposing visions which are reductive since they reduce sexual difference to a single dimension, thus excluding the complexity which characterises human difference.¹⁰

The first of these two visions is one that can be defined as essentialist. It sees sexual difference as being read from only biological fact “that is considered adequate and sufficient to define masculinity and femininity”.¹¹ It does not put any attention on historical and socio-cultural influences that contribute to the structuring of the differences of male and female identities.

In contrast, the constructivist vision sees a total dichotomy between biological sex, considered irrelevant in the structuring of identity, and

⁸ “*Ad personam constituendam sufficit capacitas illa remota, quae in natura rationali continetur et praesente anima spiritali semper habetur*” (J.B. LOTZ, *Ontologia*, Barcelona 1962, 313).

⁹ Cf. G. SALATELLO, *Donna-Uomo. Ricerca sul fondamento*, Napoli 2000.

¹⁰ Cf. IDEM, “*Uomo-donna: ‘dal fenomeno al fondamento’*”, in: *Studium*, 2 (2005), 253–264.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

the difference between man and woman. This is attributed exclusively to the action of historical, social and cultural conditioning and can therefore be freely and indefinitely modified by individual choices.

In reality, both of these views take as a reference point essential data, but they are limited by their partial perspective which is totally inadequate to account for sexual difference at the human level.

In the first case, that of essentialism, we can definitely say that it is fully understandable that difference is based on biology. However, when referring to human beings, the higher levels cannot be overlooked or ignored. We must accept that the multiple interactions that start from the birth of a male or a female lead to the existence of this man or this woman.

Constructivism, however, deprives human corporeality of any meaning and assigns existence either to the weight of culture and society, regarded as decisive, or to the whim of freedom of choice, deprived of all roots in the given original body.

In both cases, then, it becomes impossible to take the subject of sexual difference as an object for reflection in order to seek its metaphysical foundation because it is consigned to either investigations of biology alone or to analysis of the empirical human sciences such as psychology and sociology.

* * *

At the root of the reductionism of the concepts just mentioned there is, in reality, a dualistic prejudice that is unable to hold together the corporeal dimension and the spiritual dimension. Therefore it inevitably takes only one of these into consideration thus creating an irreparable fracture that can no longer be reconstructed.

Returning to the anthropology that we have just proposed, it is necessary to articulate and further specify the relationship of the body with the spiritual soul that informs it, moving from the observation that the body is always originally marked by sexual difference, that is, it is always a male body or a female body.

Although sexual difference cannot be reduced to only biological fact, as we have seen, there is no doubt that it is intrinsic to corporeality. Consequently, in order to grasp its human meaning, it is necessary to be able to identify that of the body.

To proceed in this direction, we must go back to the statement that the person is characterised by his/her ability to make conscious acts of intelligence with free will and to open up to an infinite perspective. However, it must immediately be noted that these acts, while not being “of the body”, are, however, impossible without the body, as evidenced by knowledge analysis which identifies the origin of this in the data provided through sensation.¹²

The body, therefore, is not alien to the implementation of spirituality. In fact, we can even say that it draws from this the meaning that characterises it with respect to that of any other that exists. However, since it is always intrinsically sexed, the same difference introduced by sexual difference participates in such meaning and human difference, rooted in the body, but not exclusively corporeal.

Sexual difference, then, is not only about primary and secondary sexual characteristics. On the other hand, because of its corporeal roots, it is not a social cultural construct. It is a constitutive dimension of human identity, which is always that of a man or a woman, and it is on the metaphysical level of essence that makes both sexes identically human in their difference.

Different sexual belonging, distinct from genitalia, specifies all human acts in an inevitable polar tension between equality and difference, for which you cannot say that human beings are equal in dignity and value in spite of their difference. It is only in this that they are so since there is no person if not in the concrete modalities of male or female.

¹² “*La corporeità dell'uomo e necessariamente un elemento del suo divenire–spirito, non quindi una realtà estranea allo spirito, ma un momento limitato nella attuazione dello spirito stesso*” (K. RAHNER, “*L'unità vigente tra spirito e materia nella concezione cristiana*”, in: *Nuovi Saggi* I, Roma 1968, 285).

Based on the foregoing considerations, we can fully agree with the assertion that sexual difference “crosses from bottom to top (or perhaps rather from top to bottom) the whole human being, flesh and spirit”.¹³

It receives from the latter its human peculiarities and expresses mutual intentionality by the man and woman that goes beyond pure biological complementarity from the moment that “they are for each other and their unity will be even closer and more affirmed to the extent that their diversity is respected”.¹⁴

There is not, therefore, an undifferentiated human essence that is later determined by sexual difference. It is because we are dealing with existing concrete persons here and not with the abstract concept of the individual, that humanity and difference are inseparable. The Book of Genesis attests to this when it refers to the only creative act by which “God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Gen 1: 27*).

At the end of this whole discussion it is finally possible to return to the initial objective and see that the two concepts, person and sexual difference, are not simply juxtaposed for exhibition purposes. It is only together, in their intrinsic connectedness, that they express the truth of the human being, man or woman, existing in primal sexual difference.

FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

The previous reflections on sexual difference in its relationship with the concept of person can be the starting point for some significant considerations that, in turn, could be taken as a sound basis for opening up further research perspectives.

¹³ J. DE FINANCE, *A tu per tu con l'altro. Saggio sull'alterità*, Roma 2004, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

Here it would be good to mention two of them that are particularly relevant in terms of theoretical research, but which are also introductory to further investigation in ethics.

First of all, the anthropological vision that was outlined allows us to start a fruitful critical comparison with an approach to the issue of sexual difference that was not mentioned initially. That is because, unlike the essentialist and constructivist, it is not simplistic.

In addition to aspects that are undoubtedly positive, it also presents inherent limitations that cannot be overcome by remaining within it.

This is the so-called, “thought of sexual difference”, the most accomplished processing of which is due to the French philosopher Luce Irigaray, but which was later taken up and developed by other scholars.¹⁵

Luce Irigaray argues strongly that “sexual difference is part of human identity as a privileged dimension of human beings and their fulfilment”.¹⁶ She bases this claim, above all, on recognition of the originality of difference which is inscribed in the body as something non-transcendable.

On the other hand, however, difference is also attributed with a deep symbolic and cultural value that has been developed only by men for centuries, thus depriving women of their autonomous subjectivity.

Women, therefore, must recover their identity and freely bring about a culture that reflects the peculiarities of women that until now have been hidden.

This project that is both theoretical and ethical has, as mentioned, valid aspects that can be shared. However, it also meets insurmountable obstacles when the affirmed originality of sexual difference becomes absolute in the absence of a metaphysical or theological foundation that can ensure the unity of the human race in its differentiated existence.

¹⁵ Two works by Irigaray are particularly relevant here: L. IRIGARAY, *To Be Two*, New York 2001; IDEM, *Democracy Begins Between Two*, London 2000.

¹⁶ L. IRIGARAY, *To Be Two*, op. cit. (Italian edition: *Essere due*, Torino 1994, 43).

Man and woman are configured in the end as two absolutes rather than as the two different variations of identical humanity. In this way, the relationship and communication between the two that Irigaray wishes to safeguard and promote is also compromised, although mutual destination is already prefigured in corporeality.

All of this immediately challenges Christian anthropology to continue to further articulate its research. It underscores that the positively human significance of sexual difference is inseparable from referral to a radical unity between man and woman which originated in the act of creation and is imprinted in that which is the deepest metaphysically constitutive structure.

* * *

There is a second set of considerations that I would like to briefly mention that can point the way for further research. They come from the observation that awareness of personal sexual identity is inseparable from the perception of an insurmountable limit. This is the impossibility of access to the identity of the different by sex.

Human subjects, while they accept that they are sexual beings, they feel finite and see in the other a possibility for the fulfilment of the human to which they themselves are closed, although, on the basis of identical nature, they are fully decipherable.

The relationship between the sexes, which, as I said, on a human level goes beyond purely biological complementarity, opens, thus, the possibility of mutual enrichment which allows the integration in masculine or feminine identity, through communication and exchange, those aspects of our common humanity of which the different sex is more clearly the bearer.

This reflection until now has remained on the anthropological level, but it immediately has a crucial ethical importance. This is because the relationship between the sexes that is not circumscribed only to the genital, which indeed it may deliberately ignore, is emerging as the place for the enrichment of both.

Only together can they express the whole value of the human.

Sexual difference and the concept of person

The wealth that relationship can bring concerns all areas of life, but we cannot but think of the life of the Church that needs the “voices” of both of those who are in the image of God. Because different, they can express together the full breadth and depth of God’s plan for humanity.¹⁷

* * *

These perspectives that we have just mentioned that are now opening up can highlight how the theme of sexual difference is not additional with respect to the crucial questions of anthropology and ethics. It goes through everything transversally, and it requires more and more in–depth research on the part of those who are committed to basing their study on the vision of the human being proposed by the Word of God.

¹⁷ Cf. 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, 31 May 2004.

Is it possible to propose ethics in a liquid society?

OANA GOTIA*

What is the meaning of authentic ethics? What contribution are women making to its development?

THE CRISIS

It seems that any effort to put forward an ethical issue today is to embark on an endeavour that is doomed to failure. Nowadays ethics is understood to be external “regulation”, so how is it possible to morally “regulate” a pluralistic and “liquid” society like ours? This “regulation” is regarded as being particularly frustrating because it is perceived to be an intervention that is purely extrinsic to an individual’s personal life. This frustration is an “allergic” reaction which has its roots in the concept of a rather legalistic reductive ethics that reached its apex in the Enlightenment and in Kant’s rigorous systematic approach,¹ one that imposes obligation on isolated acts that the human subject is duty-bound to perform.

This extrinsic ethical approach also influences Christian morality. It paralyses it by identifying the Christian life with an effort to reach the “perfect fulfilment of the law”. “In the end, moralism is faced with the *aporia* of a question that it cannot answer: why should I act morally? As long as it remains under the ethics of a ‘third person’

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¹ Cf. L. MELINA, *Azione: epifania dell'amore. La morale cristiana oltre il moralismo e l'antimoralismo*, Siena 2008, 24.

[that is, that of the ‘court’] the radical issue of the basis of obligation remains insoluble”.²

So what is the essence of ethics? Apparently marginal and sectional, the question of the interconnection between reason and feelings and the human bonds that derive from this is at the heart of ethics. This has always been evidenced by the history of philosophy from Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics to Thomas, from Hobbes to Hume, and from Kant and Hegel to Bentham.³ Public ethics that omit any consideration of emotional relationship, the basis of human relationships that are the fabric of society, do not seem to be adequately prepared to understand the nature of these social phenomena for which they would like to impose a regulatory assessment.⁴ The presence or absence of values in a society that may or may not seek the common good, the protection of the weak, the safeguarding of the lives of every individual in a society, each one inviolable depends on the anthropological vision that is at its foundation.

If the scope of the ethical (*ethos*) is meant to be intimately linked to that of affection (*pathos*) and reason (*logos*), you can see that today these areas are perceived to be clearly separate. Rationality is increasingly being shaped according to the techno–scientific model and feelings are reduced to emotionalism.⁵

² *Ibid.*, 26.

³ Cf. F. BOTTURI, “*Etica degli affetti?*”, in: F. BOTTURI – C. VIGNA, *Affetti e legami*, Milano 2004, 39.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵ “Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. [...] But moral judgments, being expressions of attitude or feeling, are neither true nor false; and agreement in moral judgments is not to be secured by any rational method, for there are none. It is to be secured, if at all, by producing certain non–rational effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree with one. We use moral judgments not only to express our own feelings and attitudes, but also precisely to produce such effects in others” (A. MACINTYRE, *After virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame 2007³, 11).

Therefore the ethics of a pluralist society, for its part, becomes a collection of procedural rules of formal justice which is based on common renunciation to claims of a veritative nature regarding the good and the acceptance of relativism, governed by the law of the majority as the cornerstone of democracy.⁶

This public ethical fragmentation manifests clearly the crisis that exists in the micro-cosmos of interpersonal relations. Bauman speaks of the model of liquid society as one of people without ties, and in particular without fixed attachments.⁷ Paradoxically, today people seek the safety of gathering with others and are anxious to “establish relations”, yet they are afraid to remain “tied down” in stable relationships that could become burdensome and tense. People either do not want them or they think that they could not cope with them and so they can greatly limit their longed-for freedom to establish relationships.⁸ Today’s ethical model of connections is that of “top-pocket relationships”⁹ or the model of “semi-free couples” that are praised as the “revolutionaries who have burst the suffocating couple bubble”.¹⁰ For this reason, today we talk more and more frequently about, not relationships, but of “networks”. They suggest a context which you can easily enter or exit.¹¹ There is therefore a tendency to “take cover” from the immanent vulnerability of any relationship, and so minimise any personal involvement, since it is considered to be a temporary connection in any case. The lower the mortgage, [less commitment], the less insecure you will feel when you are exposed to fluctuations in your emotions in the future.¹²

⁶ Cf. L. MELINA – J. NORIEGA – J.J. PÉREZ-SOBA, *Camminare nella luce dell'amore. I fondamenti della morale cristiana*, Siena 2008, 84.

⁷ Cf. Z. BAUMAN, *Amore liquido*, Roma-Bari 2006, (In English: *Liquid love*, Cambridge 2003), v.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, vi.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, x-xi.

¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 31.

Paradoxically, behind this type of connection, there is a kind of individualism that identifies the meaning of human life with that of its absolute autonomy, a goal that involves the “disinfestation” of any “residue” of ties with others and that sinks the individual into “asocial and ahistorical” solitude.¹³ By denying the intrinsic relatedness of each person, we tend to live with a sense of total self-reference. This does violence to the original experience of every person that demonstrates the fact that we live from the start with an original dependence originating from the other and the Other. Human relations are an integral and edifying part of our identity. The fact that each one is also a daughter or son, grandchild, brother or sister, wife or husband, mother or father, friend, in this family and culture, are not accidental facts. They are essential and have shaped my “self” today and continue to do so.

In what way do human bonds and hence also their ethics break the vicious circle of our liquid society today that offers such a dilution of the lifeblood that feeds true and authentic human relationships?

STARTING FROM EXPERIENCE

It can be seen that the fundamental question concerning authentic ethics is not: why should I act morally? This would demonstrate the dangerous assumption of the rejection of the moral dimension as a constitutive and intrinsic quality of the human experience.¹⁴ The question that drives our actions and therefore also its ethics is: who are we and what are we meant to become?

The key is to understand how our human experience is the starting point for appropriate ethics, ethics “in the first person” (*Veritatis Splendor*). Moral experience is so dramatically important

¹³ Cf. F. BOTTURI, “*Relazione e generatività*”, a presentation at the International Colloquium “*Una caro: il linguaggio del corpo e l’unione coniugale*” (Rome 20–21 September 2012).

¹⁴ Cf. L. MELINA, *Azione: epifania dell’amore*, op. cit., 26.

precisely because it commits human beings to finding the meaning of their lives,¹⁵ in the search for fullness of life, a good life. This is not experience understood as being empirical and episodic. It is the specific experience of human beings, the “original” experience as John Paul II calls it. It involves our whole person in what is profoundly ours to do: to seek fullness in our actions aimed at our concrete good and that of others.

If we use the original experience of the human person as our starting point, we do not close ourselves into self-referencing. This is because each of us is generated for experience before we ever have it.¹⁶ It is very important, therefore, to recognise that our experience as free human subjects implies a prior skill that has been “activated” by someone else. This means that one is capable of experience as we have been accepted in various ways and measures in the circle of recognition and learning. Someone else (to whom I have been entrusted) recognised me and taught me how to get experience as a person. This is not recognition that constitutes me as a person, but to exist as a person.¹⁷ It is the paradox of dependant autonomy and dependence enabling autonomy, according to MacIntyre.¹⁸

What is the primal human experience that is the basis of all the others?

The primal experience of love

“Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed

¹⁵ Cf. G. ANGELINI, “*Il senso orientato al sapere*”, in: G. COLOMBO (ed.), *L'evidenza e la fede*, Milano 1988, 387–443.

¹⁶ Cf. F. BOTTURI, Presentation on “*Relazione e generatività*”, cit.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cf. A. MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Chicago 2001.

to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it”.¹⁹

What concept of love is being referred to by John Paul II? Certainly, this is not a case of having a concept of love that is aimed at a union through fusion or uniformity by which we return to the Platonic tradition of unity of identity,²⁰ one that erases the differences (typical of romanticism), or love without truth (emotionalism).

Love as a fundamental human experience is the one that begins with the acceptance and response to a gift of the presence of the other and Other in our lives. Here the role of women is crucial in building ethics of giving and loving and giving oneself in truth.

I quote here the words of a great Polish philosopher, a friend and collaborator of John Paul II, Stanislaw Grygiel, who wrote a wonderful book on the subject of woman: “Truth is a gift, and woman is the picture of how to receive this gift and how to be so for others. Women are more introspective than men, and they accept and give themselves more than men do. If this is how it is, it is clear that the future of men lies in the love that unites men and women. It is a love in which femininity radiates from the woman and masculinity radiates from the man [...].It is the woman who knows how to take hold of the gift of the fundamental truths of life [...] but it is the man who provides the necessary energy for the propagation of the truth, once he has perceived, by means of the woman, the inaccessible and inscrutable destiny of human life”.²¹

It is, therefore, primarily a love open to what is real about the other person, one that accepts without building stereotypes that deform the original otherness of the person with whom one enters into a relationship. Only love makes us able to really know a person because it is the only way in which the other is manifested to us by revealing

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 10.

²⁰ Cf. F. BOTTURI, Presentation on “*Relazione e generatività*”, cit.

²¹ S. GRYGIEL, *Dolce guida e cara*, Siena 2008, 15.

his/her unique and irreducible value.²² In the words of Levinas, there is real relationship if the other is not reducible to the identical.²³ The love between men and women is a relationship of love that unites within difference, connects without homogenising, is present without absorbing and gives itself without getting lost. “The emotive nature of love is [instead] in duality unsurpassed by beings. It is a relationship with what escapes forever. Relationship does not *ipso facto* neutralise otherness, but preserves it”.²⁴

Of all the differences between people, sexual difference is the most radical. Why is this? It is sexual difference that has brought about the current thinking that human beings are definable in their identity only by their absolute freedom. On the contrary, sexual difference manifests in a fundamental way the truth of the human person. Before any act of freedom on the part of a person, the sexual difference that is rooted and revealed in the body manifests the deep-seated dependence and the original relatedness of the individual person that will make possible the fundamental relationship of spouses and parents. Sexual difference therefore signifies an even more original ontological difference. The other, being sexually different from the person in question, is the “placeholder”²⁵ of God in that person’s life. The difference inscribed in the body is called to openness to the Other, recognition of one’s own creaturely contingency and of a vocation to love that only in God will find fulfilment. The experience of love allows us to understand not only that God is the source of love, but also that communion with God is its ultimate purpose. Only

²² Cf. L. MELINA, *Azione: epifania dell’amore*, op. cit., 147.

²³ Cf. E. LÉVINAS, *Il tempo e l’altro*, ed. it. A cura di F.P. Ciglia, Genova 1987, (In English: *Time and the Other*, translated by R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh 1987), 55, 59, 62.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ L. MELINA, “Grammatica della differenza. La sessualità nell’orizzonte dell’amore”, in: L. MELINA – S. BELARDINELLI (eds.), *Amare nella differenza. Le forme della sessualità e il pensiero cattolico: studio interdisciplinare*, Siena e Città del Vaticano 2012, 407–430, 423.

God can fill the lives of the people that a person loves. Eros seeks something that cannot be achieved alone.²⁶

Those who put freedom before any reality delude themselves above all, and then they live in destructive tension because they are building a concept of identity that is abstract, androgynous and ahistorical.²⁷ It is androgynous because their masculinity and femininity is considered to be an indifferent reality, peripheral to their identity, and therefore the body becomes a sub-personal reality. Sexual difference allows a person to find his/her full identity only in reference to the “other” who is different from themselves, a truth which precedes their own freedom.

To put forward ethical ideas today is not to provide “easy recipes” to follow. To love today as a woman and a man is not an easy vocation and human love needs time to unfold, to become aware of its existence, to understand its scope and to see the benefits. This quality, this art of human love in the ethics of the “first person” is a result of the synergy between reason and affection that only together can become a light for action without sacrificing either of the two. Indeed, in our existence we see that it has not been just any type of relationship that was vital for us. It was only those that have “cost” us time, attention, listening, forgiveness, forgiveness of ourselves and hope in dark times, etc. Just as no fruit can be obtained without cultivation, experience teaches that love, if safeguarded, is capable of generating a new reality in ourselves and in others. As we can see at the foot of the Cross, women have a special gift for persistence in love. *Mulieris Dignitatem* tells us that this is because “those who love much succeed in overcoming their fear”²⁸ of the dangers and weaknesses inherent in every person’s life, although these do not disappear.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cf. D. CRAWFORD, “Sexuality, The Common Good and the Public Recognition of Homosexual Unions”, in: L. MELINA – S. BELARDINELLI (eds.), *Amare nella differenza*, op. cit., 477–495.

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 15.

Is it possible to propose ethics in a liquid society?

It can be seen, therefore, that the moral life is not an extrinsic rule imposed on human activity. It is everything that cooperates in developing the inner truth of love and in forming the conscience in the light of this truth.²⁹

On the one hand we see that love has the nature of a universal and original human experience that is able to reveal the fundamental truth about humanity. Christianity, on the other hand, is anthropologically significant because it offers a light that reveals ultimate meaning.³⁰

An ethic of love in truth is therefore an ethic of virtue. These ethics are centred on the person and his/her inviolable dignity, a dignity that is rooted in our being precious in the sight of God and in our being created in God's image.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

That which is specific about Christian ethics is the meeting and following of a Person, the Person of Christ. It is not the following of a manual.³¹ To live and renew this personal encounter is what will allow us then to witness to others in our families and in the world.

Only in this way, by allowing ourselves to be animated by the Holy Spirit, can Christian ethics avoid being suffocating with moralising because the Spirit is lacking. Nor will it be a spirituality without morals that escapes through intimism, spiritualism and detachment from reality. Here too, the role of women is special. It is to guard the truth of faith and love in the Church and in the world. We are taught this by Mary who welcomed the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so generated new life in the Church.³²

To propose Christian ethics today does not mean to dilute it and then lose it. We must set out from a search for the meaning of love and from the primal experience of love. We must safeguard the truth about the human

²⁹ Cf. L. MELINA – J. NORIEGA – J.J. PÉREZ-SOBA, *Camminare nella luce dell'amore*, op. cit., 627–628.

³⁰ Cf. L. MELINA, *Azione: epifania dell'amore*, op. cit., 154.

³¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 19.

³² Cf. IDEM, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 23.

person for each one is worthy of being loved right from the beginning of life and in sexual difference ingrained in our bodies. We need help to build and unify our freedom towards fullness which is always reached together with others.

II.3. Suggestions for a new civilisation of love

Speaking to young people and to those far away from the Faith about the Christian Vision of Sexuality

VICKI THORN*

Our youth are literally inundated with negative messages about the beauty of sexuality. It is trivialized in the media. Contemporary music brings angst and sexualized lyrics and behavior into the social conscience. The internet brings pornographic images into people's hearts and minds. Boys become addicted before they are men and girls who see it say they cannot get it out of their minds. Young girls are sexualized by the clothing and make-up that are presented to little girls and adolescents. One must dress provocatively to be noticed. The internet creates a pseudo-world through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. I am defined by what others post about me. I define myself in any way that I want but without authenticity.

Fertility is a pathology to be treated and cured through birth control and abortion. Men are trivialized as sperm donors. Children have become possessions, with parents exerting high expectations of beauty and performance in sport, music, academia or profession. The child conceived with a disability is not treasured but is a disappointment and may end up aborted. Children can be conceived through sperm donors or banks with purchased ovum conceived in petri dishes and flash frozen in suspended animation until someone

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decides to call them forth... or decides to leave them frozen. Wombs are rented through surrogacy without any idea of the long term consequences to surrogate or offspring. Money often changes hands when a surrogate agrees to carry a child for someone. The receiving parents may be two men, two women or a couple that divorce before the child arrives or who decide that the surrogate should have an abortion because of some disability. Who are the parents in these situations? Are they those who contract for a child or those who deliver the child? It is possible to have five people who are part of the making of the baby. The child is not gift. The child is a product! The sex of the child may condemn it to certain death in some countries where only boys have economic value and girls are seen as an economic liability. In the last three years books have been written in the United States on the glories of childlessness, extolling the freedom of this experience.¹

The concept of a gender neutral world is extolled. If only women were more masculine and males were more feminine how wonderful it would all be. There is no celebration of maleness or of the feminine genius in many places. Gender neutral toys are being offered. Children are being raised in gender neutrality and it is celebrated. Some parents refuse to announce the sex of their child and they allow the child to explore maleness and femaleness and then decide. The concept of transgenderism is exploding. Gender neutral bathrooms are being made available in grade schools and other places. It is acceptable to decide you want to be the other sex as a young child and the government will support that, but those who try to help those who are in need of counselling to sort gender and sexuality issues are forbidden by law to help! Gender neutral

¹ Cf. L.S. SCOTT, *Two Is Enough: a Couple's Guide to Living Childless by Choice*, Berkley 2009; E.L. WALKER, *Complete Without Kids: an Insider's Guide to Childfree Living by Choice or by Chance*, Austin 2011; L. CARROLL, *The Baby Matrix: Why Freeing Our Minds From Outmoded Thinking About Parenthood & Reproduction Will Create a Better World*, s.l. 2012.

housing options are being offered to students on campuses. Sexuality is apparently a fluid concept that moves.

Cohabitation is exploding. People are deathly afraid of commitment. Marriages are disintegrating, leaving many survivors who fear marriage and no longer believe in the possibility of life-long sacramental love. Multitudes of parents around the world have fallen victim to the sexual revolution and carry confusion and wounds from uncommitted and promiscuous sexual activity that makes them feel incompetent to discuss sexual values with their children. It is rare to see Christian sexuality portrayed in literature or the media. Role models that used to be in our families, such as parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents or close friends who loved us and were witnesses of committed love are no longer in our lives because of mobility and the breakdown of family. The sacramental covenant of Matrimony is being replaced by contractual agreements between two individuals. No longer is it until death do we part, but rather until you displease me and then we shall part. Serial monogamy reigns as does living together to see if it works... sometimes ending after many years and several children.

All of these social shifts make it difficult to see healthy sexuality!
All of these shifts create confusion!

It is the role of the Church to speak the truth of sexuality as God intended it. The work I have done through the Rachel Project in helping women and men heal after abortion made me long to help people to avoid having to make the decision to abort a pregnancy. A life experience of having a baby due the same day as a friend of mine and the subsequent birth of our babies within 24 hours of each other lead me to early research on the science of attachment and bonding or the Biology of the Theology of the Body.

I have spoken to multitudes of young people in the past nine years using a science based approach. These are high school and college students, young adults and not so young adults. I find that people are more receptive to this kind of information. When they know how complex we are made and how we are truly changed in

every act of intimacy, this reconfigures some of the lies of society. I find that men find this presentation to be fascinating and beneficial. Let me spend a few moments highlighting some of the information for you.

It is important to know that the brain rewires itself between the ages of 11 and 19 and that brain development is not complete until 25.² We have been led to believe that adolescent brains are fully functional adult brains. Additional research has found that when an infant or child is stressed a great deal, the brain becomes what is called a stress brain. This means that when stress occurs or they feel frightened they very quickly move from the higher functioning part of the brain to the fear center. Reactions in this mode are different. They are not rational and informed, but survival driven. Additionally, research has found that those who are stressed young have a brain change.³ The part of the brain where moral development is located does not activate when it should and so when we try to use moral language and concepts they may not be able to process it. If someone is fearful, they are operating out of a self-preservation drive.

I have found that in speaking to the young, when using science and biology as the basis of a talk, they can and do hear it. It empowers them to keep themselves safe and to make real decisions based on facts. They inform me, when I encounter them later, that they were also able to speak to their friends about making better choices. They

² Cf. B. STRAUCH, *The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries about the Teenage Brain Tell Us about Our Kids*, New York 2003; D. WALSH & N. BENNETT, *Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*, New York 2004.

³ Cf. B.C. TABER-THOMAS et al., "Arrested development: early prefrontal lesions impair the maturation of moral judgement", in: *Brain*, vol. 137, n. 4, April 2014, 1254-1261; J.-P. CHANGEUX, A. DAMASIO, W. SINGER (eds.) *Neurobiology of Human Values. Research and Perspectives in Neurosciences*, Berlin Heidelberg 2005, 140; *Toxic stress: the facts*, Center on the developing child, Harvard University, http://developingchild.harvard.edu/topics/science_of_early_childhood/toxic_stress_response/.

say that their lives have been changed by the information they have received.

Helping young people to make links between their lived experience and things they may have heard about in Scripture and Church teaching, even if only in a cursory way, allows them to integrate what they have heard that is faith-based with what they have heard that is science-based. It often seems to me that we avoid science because we are afraid it will challenge Church teaching or our faith. Nothing is further from the truth. In this society where everything is readily available through the internet, people who are doubtful about what they hear can check the facts for themselves. They recognize that the facts speak to their generation and they willingly take what they have learned and share it with others. When they are equipped to speak about science, those they are speaking to cannot accuse them of “just being Catholic” and say “what do those celibate clergy know about anything”.

I begin by speaking about family connections across generations through the mitochondria which are the energy bodies in our cells. Everyone in the world carries the mitochondria of their mothers, back to seven lines of women. I point out that the Y chromosome of the male is his father’s, back through many generations.⁴ In Scripture we read about “who begat who”. In God’s world where we came from matters.

Women will cycle together if they are in close proximity.⁵ In ancient times, if I died after having a baby it insured that someone else could feed my baby. The Birth Control Pill interferes with this synchronicity. Women are gifted by God to perceive pheromones, scent molecules of affiliation, which signal on first meeting if a male is

⁴ Cf. B. SYKES, *The Seven Daughters of Eve: The Science That Reveals Our Genetic Ancestry*, New York 2001; IDEM, *Adam’s Curse: A Future without Men*, New York 2004.

⁵ Cf. G. DOLYAN DESCORNET, *Menstrual Synchrony*, <http://www.women-health-info.com/blog/menstrual-synchrony>; M. STODDARD, *Menstrual Synchrony*, <http://www.livinghealthy360.com/index.php/menstrual-synchrony-21409/>.

a possible biological match for her.⁶ If she is not using contraceptives she will be attracted to a mate who is a good biological match. If she is using contraceptives she is attracted to a male whose immune system is too much like hers. This will be a fertility challenge to them as a couple as it smothers the sexual spark in the relationship and may lead to divorce. If children are conceived, contraceptives may predispose her, and her children, to certain autoimmune diseases later. A critical fact is that women carry cells from every child they have conceived for perhaps the rest of their lives. This is called “microchimerism”.⁷ The cells can be found in her body from the fourth week after conception, and they seem to be left in her body if an abortion or miscarriage occurs. These cells may be reparative in her body or predispose her to autoimmune disease depending on the immune system of the male that she picked. Mothers pass these cells on to the other children they conceive. The cells of the mother are present in her children as well. The two parents have truly become one because the mother carries the DNA of every partner with whom she has conceived a child for the rest of her life. Random pairings that result in pregnancy have changed her body in a significant way as does the hormonal absorption of seminal fluid with all of the hormones and other substances contained there. Chemical contraceptives are systemic steroidal hormones that change the way a woman’s brain grows making it more like a male brain. They lower her libido, cause depression, cause nutritional deficiencies and may create a host of health issues, including cancer and blood clots. The World Health Organization says that the pill is a type 1 carcinogen.⁸

⁶ Cf. M. WENNER, *Birth Control Pills Affect Women’s Taste in Men*: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/birth-control-pills-affect-womens-taste/>.

⁷ S. KEAN, “The You in Me”, in: *Psychology Today*: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201303/the-you-in-me>; see also: <http://www.microchimerism.org/>.

⁸ Cf. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, *Carcinogenicity of combined hormonal contraceptives and combined menopausal treatment. Statement*: http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/ageing/cocs_brt_statement.pdf?ua=1.

The reality is that chemical contraceptives have sown a trail of harmful consequences for women's health and for relationships and this is never discussed. In short, women choose the wrong biological partners when they use contraceptives before marriage, and if the woman begins to use the pill after marriage, it will make her feel that the partner is unsuitable in terms of sexual intimacy. Her libido will often be blocked and may not return when she stops using the pill. The spark that ignites sexual intimacy can be extinguished for her and for her companion, and since the pill prevents ovulation, he will not perceive in her any increase in desire which is normal in that period. If he is at work or elsewhere, and he should be next to a woman who does not use contraceptives, he might feel a certain attraction if she is in the process of ovulation. This could end up in infidelity. Recent research shows that the brains of women can grow differently under the influence of the steroid hormones in contraceptives. They may even appear more masculine.⁹ If you choose the biologically wrong partner, there may be infertility or complications in fertility, and the children conceived may have an impaired immune system. The action of chemical contraceptives prevents menstrual synchrony with other women. Many women experience depression or mood swings. There can be serious health complications like embolisms, some cancers and other physiological disorders due to the impact of a systemic steroid hormone.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE, "Birth control pills affect memory, researchers find", in: *Science Daily*, 9 September 2011: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/09/110909141637.htm>; C.H. KINSLEY & E.A. MEYER, "Women's Brain on Steroids. Birth control pills appear to remodel brain structure", in: *Scientific American*, September 28, 2010: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/womens-brains-on-steroids/>.

¹⁰ Cf. J. WILKS, *A Consumer's Guide to the Pill and Other Drugs*, Stafford 1997; C. KAHLNBORN, *Breast Cancer Its Link to Abortion and the Birth Control Pill*, Dayton 2013; H. GRIGG-SPALL, *Sweetening the Pill: or How We Got Hooked on Hormonal Birth Control*, Alresford 2013; S. RAKO, *The Blessings of the Curse: No More Periods?*, Lincoln 2006.

Women have not been informed about all of this, and they have suffered.

Men are fascinated to hear that they are hormonally changed when there is a pregnancy. The changes are triggered by these pheromones and begin as early as a few weeks into the pregnancy. Most men experience *couvade* syndrome, that is, they feel the symptoms of pregnancy that their wives are experiencing (changes in hormonal levels, sleep disturbance, nausea, etc.). About six weeks before the birth of the baby, the father undergoes hormonal changes that prime him for care giving.¹¹ When his hormones return to normal, one of these does not. His testosterone stays lower, thus helping him to bond with the baby. If men are helped to understand the wonders of their body, the different types of sperm and their fragility, and their need to be careful in all of this, it changes men's view of their own biology. Men are fascinated to learn that the ovum picks the sperm and that his sperm must be changed in her body for it to be able to enter the ovum at all.

Talking about the miracle of new life is powerful. We need to be reminded that life is a miracle and that God always is the creator of new life, regardless of the circumstances. Explanation of the consequences of abortion decisions by both women and men gives a new perspective to the societal lie that abortion is a simple medical procedure without consequences. To acquaint people with methods of fertility awareness empowers both women and men to appreciate the gift of fertility and no longer to see it as a pathology that needs treatment. Men speak of how fascinated they are with the fertility cycle they share with their wife. When we speak about the statistics on divorce amongst couples who use fertility awareness in their marriages, people are stunned to see that the statistics are so low.

¹¹ Cf. J. PINCOTT, "The Plight of the Pregnant Man", in: *Wall Street Journal* online, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203476804576614901064779300>.

When couples understand the brief window of fertility and the biological changes and signals that occur, drawing them into a dance of intimacy, they come to appreciate in a new way how they are made by God, fearsomely and awesomely. True appreciation grows in the recognition of the complex and intricate gift of fertility. The Theology of the Body, so carefully and beautifully spelled out by Blessed John Paul II, makes sense now and leads them to an ever greater appreciation of the gift of sexuality and the powerful teaching of the Church.

My experience is that the young are searching for the truth. They may be living a lifestyle that is counter to Church teaching, but they are open to the scientific facts. So often they share with us that they intuitively knew something was wrong, but could not put words or action to it. The concept of sexual sin is often buried because sex has come to be viewed as a recreational activity that is without consequence unless I choose to give it meaning. I find that young people can be shocked to be reminded that they are embodied people, stone age bodies in a highly technological world. We are not in touch with our bodies in today's world. It is all about what is going on in my brain; what my intention is. My body is a sort of encumbrance that needs care, feeding and tending, but often people are quite disconnected from the fact that they are a unified whole... body, mind and soul!

My experience is that the males in particular appreciate learning how their body works; how they are changed by pregnancy; that they are the more fragile of the two sexes; the complexity of their bodies from seminal fluid to the different types of sperm, their purpose and fragility. Understanding that things like cell phones, lap tops, hot baths and marijuana pose serious threats to the health of the sperm changes things for them.¹² Learning that they have biological

¹² Cf. "New Studies Reveal Stunning Evidence that Cell Phone Radiation Damages DNA, Brain and Sperm", in: *Newswise*, 18 May 2011, <http://www.newswise.com/articles/new-studies-reveal-stunning-evidence-that-cell-phone-radiation-damag>

knowledge of the pregnancy of their partner and that their body is also changed by the pregnancy opens their hearts to the marvel of creating new life. They are astonished to know that they are being hard wired to respond to ovulation as well as for fatherhood and it seems to give them a sense that the responsibility of fatherhood is not to be taken lightly. This changes the societal message that men are disposable and nothing more than sperm donors. Understanding the intimate bond he has with his wife and that she is biologically changed by each act of intimacy, brings him new awareness. When he understands that his wife carries the cells of the children they have conceived for the rest of her life, the meaning of two becoming one becomes a reality! Men need to be reminded that they are protectors and that a choice of sexual intimacy requires real decisions made by both parties. They must know that the consequences of random sexual behavior are long term and heart breaking, whether it results in pregnancy, abortion or the contraction of a sexually transmitted disease that may be untreatable.

Pornography needs to be challenged. It needs to be named as addiction, and not sex. It is a fantasy world that women should not tolerate for we can never match up to the women who are available and changeable upon whim! Pornography destroys true intimacy. It never improves a relationship, and it leads to infidelity, abuse and a host of other issues. Women say they are not able to delete the images from their mind once they have seen them! They create perverse expectations even in real relationships!

I believe that it is imperative that we communicate with our children when they are young about the awesome gift of their

es-dna-brain-and-sperm; S. BHATTACHARYA, "Coffee Makes Sperm Speed Up", in: *NewsScientist*, 14 October 2003, <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn4267-coffee-makes-sperm-speed-up.html#.U0MfXqLesTA>; A. HOUGH, "Using Wi-Fi on a Laptop 'Damages Sperm', Study Suggests", in: *The Telegraph*, 30 November 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/8924820/Using-wi-fi-on-a-laptop-damages-sperm-study-suggests.html>; see also: R. BAKER, *Sperm Wars: Infidelity, Sexual Conflict, and Other Bedroom Battles*, New York 2006.

bodies, female and male! Small children will imitate their mothers in caring for infants and nursing! As women, we need to speak to the young women we know and tell them the positive experiences we have had of childbirth. So much of what they have heard is negative and they are terrified of the experience. Showing both women and men babies in utero and informing them about what babies are capable of in utero breaks the lie that the unborn child is nothing but a clump of inanimate cells that suddenly take on human form at birth but prior to that are disposable if inconvenient. The humanity of the unborn must be shown!

We need to make conscious choices to speak of children as gift and to open our own hearts and homes to children. We must tell young people we are in contact with that marriage is sacred and a gift. They need to see marriages that work and to know that conflict can be worked out. We need to speak about intimacy and the bonding that occurs through sacrificial love of the other. In many countries, the phenomenon of the only child has created many narcissists who are mostly concerned about themselves and their needs. I honestly do not know how to reach their hearts and help them to become hearts that are concerned first for others.

I do know that we need to affirm married couples. I encourage you to reach out to young families and offer support in some way. I encourage you to approach young families and compliment them on their families because so often they are verbally assaulted by strangers who tell them how stupid they are to have children. It is important to be those who reach out to the young and speak the truth to them while loving them. When we reach out in love, hearts are opened and it is possible to speak the truth of committed Christian love to them; to speak about the sacrament of matrimony and what that means in today's world ... a counter cultural choice that is a sign of God's love and fidelity to His people just as children are a sign of God's blessing. We need to witness to the sanctity of marriage as sacrament and speak of the relationship of the couple with God!.

Vicki Thorn

We must be able to speak about the science and to challenge the contemporary wisdom that hormonal contraception is a wonderful thing that sets women free, and invite people to conversation with us. Our goal is to empower young Christians to see that their sexuality is a God-given gift that is life giving and that calls us to sacrificial love for our spouse and openness to the gift of children.

It is the truth that sets us free! We must be willing to be informed and courageous enough to speak the truth with love, and witness to a life where our sexuality is seen as gift from God and our fertility is seen as a blessing.

Mature male and female identities

COSTANZA MIRIANO*

When I first read *Mulieris Dignitatem* I suppose I understood practically nothing of what it said. I was seventeen, and it seemed to have odd ideas about how we should be male and female, about marriage and about mistaken equality between the sexes. They seemed fine words, but destined to remain on paper.

Ten years after the apostolic letter I got married, and the next fifteen were spent practically trying to understand it. Slowly, over time, the words of the Holy Father were translated into flesh. They were embodied into our story as a couple, they gave a name to what I was living and also, in part, suffering.

I think that we suffer when we forget that – as Rilke said – there is a paradox in the experience of love. Two infinite needs to be loved meet with two fragile and limited capacities to love. Only within the horizon of a bigger love is it possible not to be consumed in mutual claims and not to be resigned, but to walk together towards a destiny of which the other is a sign.

Man and woman are two poverties that meet and give themselves. The “mutual claims” are destined to be disappointed because of our sin and because of the differences between men and women. To have an adult identity in my opinion means precisely to accept this truth: that the other can never fill all expectations, even the involuntary ones, or claims that we make on the person who is close to us.

To have a wider perspective means that the small losses and the mutual disappointments can be experienced not as crevasses to be

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avoided, nor as claims, but as an “easy yoke”, a light weight that leads to one’s own conversion, which is then the end of life here on earth.

Every expectation is detached because love is not a spontaneous symbiotic union that is easy and free and that takes the name of love, at least in Western culture from Romanticism onwards. Every expectation is detached, as I said, and therefore it is the shattering of life on our ego, on the part of us that is wounded by original sin and therefore does not work, does not allow us to enter into a real relationship with God. Every man and woman is called above all to be spouses of the Lord, whether they are consecrated, and therefore directly his spouses, or whether they are married, and then the other becomes the privileged way to love and receive love from God, who always remains our spouse. That which heals relationships is to remember that if the objective of marriage is to produce children, the subjective is to generate ourselves. Therefore, exactly as with consecrated persons, it is the relationship with God that defines us, and our spouse is the way to achieve this union with God. By loving one’s spouse, we love God, and this allows us to escape the logic of “controller” that seems to prevail with many couples. At a much deeper level, men and women are made in the image of God, and so necessarily the relationship with the other says something decisive about ourselves.

The other then, so different, who so often makes us angry and get annoyed, who disappoints us and hurts us, is not wrong, but is simply the “placeholder for the totally Other”, as Cardinal Scola defined it, and forces us to a question about the meaning of it and forces us to conversion. It leads us to an unintentional form of love I would say that comes from renouncing all or much of what was expected or projected on the other. It almost embraces the death of love as it was imagined, and we accept that we have lost. We no longer love with the momentum of emotion but with the love of a monk who carves a tiny sculpture under the vault of a cathedral, something small and precious that almost no one will see, only those who have the patience to look upwards. To prepare a meal or accept criticism, to accept

programme changes, silence when you would like to talk and words when you would like to sleep, look happy when you want to cry and rest when you would like to do something. In fidelity to marriage, we also participate as part of the Church in a work that transcends us, the kingdom of Heaven, even if we have been entrusted only with that small sculpture high up that no one sees.

When this dimension is missing there is only emotional love and we suffer. It is mainly women who suffer, from my experience and from that of those with whom I came into contact after writing my books, in exchanges that were deep. They suffer because they have lost touch with their deepest identity. Recent decades for women were really times of great change. This is not the subject of my speech so I will not linger on this. I only want to say that if women can find their place then everything will get back into order. Women suffer because they have nostalgia for the first gaze they received. The “here I am” of a person who responds to the “here I am” of God is essentially feminine. The more this is absorbed – writes Pavel Evdokimov¹ – the closer to the root, then women feel at ease within the limits of their being and with its presence they fill the world from within. Women have a complicity with time because they know that time is gestation and waiting for something, for someone. They are predisposed for self-giving, and fulfilled by self-giving, whether the children are theirs or not. They are nostalgic for the gaze they received at the creation. They want someone to tell them that they are beautiful. Men want to feel capable of completing projects, solving problems and to project outside of themselves.

Human beings, through women, are invited to find their spousal vocation with the Lord. It is always a vocation in which the Bride responds with her love to that of the Bridegroom, says *Mulieris Dignitatem*. For this reason, the Catechism of the Catholic Church

¹ Cf. P. EVDOKIMOV, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, New York 1994.

tells us that the Marian dimension, the vocation of all humanity that is primarily spousal, precedes the Petrine.²

St. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians speaks of marriage between a man and a woman as a great mystery. Approaching the mystery of the masculine and feminine introduces us to the mystery of God who created us male and female. We were created in God's image. The tension between men and women brings to mind the loving tension between the three persons of the Trinity, only that we are wounded by original sin.

Ephesians chapter 5 identifies the crucial points, the nodes of the sin of man and woman. The woman is invited to be submissive to her husband, the man to give his life for the bride, so that they replicate in marriage the dynamics between Christ and the Church, without domination or oppression, but in a reciprocal gift.

The woman is invited to be submissive, because, on the contrary, the constant temptation is that of control, of trying to mould and to format those entrusted, children and spouse. In reality these are qualities given by Providence in order to educate and instruct, knowing that the best of one's vocation is to help life to grow.³ Whether married or single, women safeguard life and help it to grow and guide it towards the light. Their call is to be living reminders for all humankind.

As Evdokimov says, there is a particular complicity between women, being naturally religious and faced with the most serious mysteries of life, and the life-giving Spirit and comforter. Women work hard for the salvation of humankind.

Sin is at work also in this vocation and thus the ability to steer towards the good continually threatens to turn into the temptation to want the things of the world to go as we want. We take an average man and we want to improve him, so we risk not allowing the other

² Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 773.

³ Cf. 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*, 31 May 2004, no. 13.

to be. We end up correcting, reproving and not letting others emerge with their true qualities.

Women are called to this, to act as a mirror to men, to show them a positive image of themselves, to put the leaven of love in the relationship. Women need to make room, not be afraid of losing positions, start with a positive attitude towards men, undertake to trust him and his view of the world, and be loyally determined to recognise that they are not the sole repository of good and evil, not because they are weak but because they are solid, resistant and welcoming.

This attitude, when it is honest, clear and non-manipulative, is a powerful leavening because men do not resist a spouse who is close by and submissive in the sense that she does not always impose her point of view but begins to trust and appreciate what is good in humankind. Men will then begin to feel the desire to give their lives as Christ gave his for the Church. It is not a simple joining of efforts, but the creation of a totally new reality of male and female that forms the body of the royal priesthood. "Woman is the glory of man" (1Cor 11:7), as Saint Paul says. A woman is like a mirror that reflects a man's face. He is revealed to himself and is thus corrected. Men then feel compelled to go out and dominate the earth, and to do so not for themselves but for those who are entrusted to them, and so they are prepared to take upon themselves the blows of life.

The knot of the sin of men for which Saint Paul invites them to be ready to die for their spouse, is selfishness. It is the desire to keep something for themselves, to get involved but keeping something back, to put aside, to take refuge from time to time in their private space without interference. Men find it tiring to keep their attention on their spouse, their relationship and the home.

Men have a different existential emphasis that goes beyond their own being. They tend to go out and aspire to the growth of all their energies that extend their time in the world, and they have a different relationship with power.

It is hardly necessary to point out that this is a spiritual and not a sociological talk. I am not saying that only men should go out and

make a contribution to improve the world. We are not talking about the world of work or power. This is not a speech about who has more or less dignity. It is obvious that we are on another level, and that we take it for granted that the only dignity that accounts in the Church cannot be other than the acquisition of the Spirit, and in this women are privileged.

On the spiritual level, men go forth and women receive, men look outwards and women inwards, men are the wall and the sense of reality, women are welcoming. This can be seen on the educational level. In their relationship with the children, women are gifted in the way they relate and manage things. Men are often better at pruning the deadwood. To conclude, let me mention what they say about Karol Wojtyła. As bishop he urged engaged couples not to say “I love you” but “I share the love of God with you”. This, I believe, is to have a really mature identity.

To rediscover the value of motherhood

MARISA LUCARINI*

My childhood years were in the nineteen seventies, a decade remembered for its laws on abortion, divorce and women's empowerment. My favourite slogan was, "my uterus belongs to me and it is mine to manage".

I grew up with the feeling that I had to defend myself from opportunistic and profiteering males and from children who begin to suck life from you from the time they are inside the uterus. I had this rabidly feminist attitude despite the presence of my mother. At that time she was distant from the Church and faith and she had no spiritual support, but she always welcomed and defended life, from its start until its end. It was only after a long time that I realised how much her witness had helped me.

With the help of a journey of faith with the Neocatechumenal Way, my attitude gradually changed. I got married at 22 years of age, and my husband and I decided to put our lives and our marriage in God's hands. Here I would like to stress that you cannot talk about motherhood without including fatherhood, even though today it is often considered optional.

My husband and I have journeyed together, humanly and spiritually. Now when I think back over our thirty years of marriage, I am sure that it was part of God's plan for us to be together. We are different but complementary, so different that only together can we find balance. Even in the acceptance of pregnancies and the bringing up of our children, throughout our life together it has helped us a lot

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to be the two plates of the same weighing scale. Each is needed to balance the other, for when one goes down the other one helps the partner to rise up again.

We are certainly not a perfect family who are always smiling and well behaved. Like everyone else, we have experienced crises, rebellions and periods of sadness and nervousness. We did not always find it easy to accept a new pregnancy with joy, but being able to live with the weaknesses of the other has created more authentic communion.

With pregnancy and the birth of our first child I had an experience that is common to many women. That was the moment when the centre of gravity shifted. My life was no longer mine. Now I had to live my life in function of another. I thought that somehow God was taking away my freedom and life. Furthermore, our first son was not an easy child. As well as having eating problems, he had the incredible ability of waiting for Friday evening to get sick and to recover just on time for Monday morning. This happened every weekend.

After a short time, when I was expecting my second child, I was afraid. I thought that it would be an experience that would confirm my inability to live my life according to the needs of another person. My pride was pushing me into thinking that it would be too much of a trial to bear. When that pregnancy was interrupted by a miscarriage, I gave in to the temptation of interpreting this as a punishment from God. It was as if God had taken away the child that I had refused.

After the miscarriage I went on to have two more children, but the most important experience was the period following the birth of the next one. I must admit that until then I thought of openness to life as I thought of the application of natural methods, a kind of competition with the Lord who was ready to send a child at the first failure. The Lord's way was to send me three pregnancies that my body was unable to carry to term. It was those pregnancies that finally taught me that life comes from God and not from me. I was only asked to accept it and safeguard it. I discovered that sometimes children are meant "only" for Eternal Life and certainly the word "only" is to be read between inverted commas. That discovery opened my eyes.

I thought that being open to life meant to have many children. However, I realised that real openness is respect for what God wants for me. I realised that following Christ is not something that happens when everything goes according to my plans and I am “sitting in first class”, as Pope Francis would say. It is necessary to get into the game. It is worth it. We must involve ourselves in real life and not stay on the doorstep of what I imagine or wish my life to be. So basically, I am called to accept God’s will even when I do not understand it.

When I was pregnant with our fourth child, it was a time when I had several physical problems that could have prevented the conception and development of a new pregnancy. However, I brought it to term successfully. Here I had another surprise. It is God that does the work, even when it seems humanly impossible.

Then there came the children of true openness to life that I could experience as a gift, a continuous and unique miracle. My elder children reproach me when they observe some difference in treatment between them and their younger brothers. I cannot blame them. With the passing of years I see them differently. This is not only because the children of our youth are different from the children of our later years, which is normal and to be expected, but also because over the years I discovered the beauty of experiencing every pregnancy as an unexpected gift, probably undeserved.

Perhaps this is why my last miscarriage is the one of which I was most aware. With my pregnancies I saw that God was taking nothing away from me. In fact, God was giving me dignity and an abundance of life that nothing else could match. This was something I could discover because I was supported by the Church.

I have learned over the years that my children are not a gift from God, as we often hear, but rather they belong to God. We parents are stewards and we have a duty, an assignment. When I manage to remember this, I can tidy up my relationships with them. My problem, which I think is common to many parents, is that affection often made me presumptuous. I claimed to know my children better than anyone else. It was only when I began to understand and accept that I did not

completely know them that I was able to take a little of the correction of the Church which is the valuable source to which I can always draw with both hands. Thank God!

I would like to briefly tell you how our children relate with their large family. The elder children in particular, when they realised that theirs was not a family just like those of their classmates, they were worried because every newborn reduced their living space a little bit more. Now none of them could imagine a family other than the one they have. Sometimes (rarely, but it happens) we find that there are only four or five of us at table and during the meal our children exchange looks terrified at the idea of having all of our attention and not to be able to share it with anyone. This is one of the advantages of a large family. We parents are forced to distribute among the children our anxieties, neuroses and attention which could be stifling, and this works to the children's advantage. Relations among our children have grown as they grew older. When they were small they played and quarrelled, as if they were in a gym training to enter the world. Now, despite having little time, they are happy to meet, to talk and to have fun together. The five older ones are following the Neocatechumenal Way experience each in their community and we are grateful to the Lord for the wonders worked with them. It moved me a lot this summer to see, without any intervention on our part, that the three older boys decided to go alone on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

My husband and I married in the nineteen eighties when the advancement of women and families brought about a sharp drop in births. My friends and peers have been very careful in planning their reproductive life with various contraceptive methods. Many of them would have gladly given me advice if I had allowed it. In this regard I would like to tell a little story. A few years ago when I was pushing a stroller laden with children, backpacks and shopping bags and at the same time catching one of the toddlers who was running away, I met an old friend who looked shocked and asked me a question point-blank: "... and your time?" At that moment I answered something wise and religious, but this question began to work within me and

explode in moments of crisis: “... and my time?” Then the Lord gave me more tranquil periods, less physically strenuous and finally I had more time for me and a big surprise with more time I was not happier than before!

Today I know with absolute certainty that lack of time is a great temptation that the devil uses to take peace away from the women of my generation. There is no more time to do anything, work, the housework, commuting (the traffic in big cities is a real nightmare). Children are the straw that breaks the camel’s back. Many women are waiting for better times to clean the house, to have a stable job, etc. The phrase most often heard from young couples is “this is not the time”. Thank God I was given peace by realising that it is true that God’s time is not our time! We have seven children and five in heaven and I would not change a thing in my story because it is here that I met the Lord. If I had felt that I had to choose the right time, I might not have arrived here yet.

The first pregnancies, like all those of a young couple, were greeted with enthusiasm and tenderness by relatives, friends and acquaintances, but the fourth child drew the line of demarcation between a large family and an excessively large family. The fifth child placed us among “those who know not what they are doing” and who go overboard. However, in my life I have met many women who may have been far from the Church, but they had a deep desire to open up to unplanned pregnancies that were not programmed in the “matrimonial calendar”. Sometimes, when they saw our large family and others like it, they found the courage to welcome another child. It is not because they had seen some superwomen. On the contrary, it was often precisely because of the normality of their weaknesses that was most encouraging.

In a generation that is bombarded with messages against life, witnesses are needed to show that you can have children and at the same time have a full life. Whether or not you have a job does not matter. You can have children and still be fully alive. Then again, you may not have children but you are happy anyway because joy does not

come from what you have but from what the Lord has planned for us. Motherhood does not only mean to give birth to many children. It is to be prepared to give our lives to those close to us in different ways.

It is true that children take life from us. There are many moments of fatigue when you feel that it is too much and that you cannot go on. Those moments were invaluable for me. They taught me to see my weakness, to find that children are not a result of my skill and my know-how, and to remain attached to prayer.

In the most tiring times of crisis and discouragement, listening to the Word of God or the exhortation of a priest or friend helped me to get up again. In this sense I say that the support of the Church is important to help couples in their mission and in their growth.

It is not necessary to be close to the Church to give birth to a large family, just as it is not necessary to be Christians in order to be good people. However, the Church can and must be now more than ever a beacon to help people rediscover the beauty of the complete gift of self. It is a gift that can only be completely fulfilled through an encounter with Christ.

Educate to live life as self-giving

VIRGINIA PARODI*

INTRODUCTION: THE KEY TO A CHURCH-MARY

It has always struck me how, over the centuries, art has decorated buildings of the Holy See with 'keys', from those that are embedded in the floor at the entrance of Saint Peter's Basilica, to the huge key held by the angel sitting on the canopy.

Certainly God entrusted the keys of the kingdom to Peter. That is why the papal coats of arms bear a golden key that symbolises the Kingdom of heaven and a silver key that opens the door to the earthly pilgrimage of the Church.

The teaching of Pope Francis allows us to perceive immediately what two keys he wants to use to open the doors of God's heart and that of the Church to the people of our time. I think that both can be synthesised in a single expression: self-giving love. It is the merciful love of God who loves us to the extent of giving himself on the cross, and the tireless donation of a Church that reaches out to the human family as far as the peripheries of human existence. "I dream of a Church that is a Mother and a Shepherd",¹ the Pope said, thereby confirming that self-giving love is the primary option of his vision for the Church.

This key opens the doors of a Church that accepts and embodies the feminine genius by highlighting that the gift of itself, of the Bride

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¹ A. SPADARO, "A big heart open to God: The exclusive interview with Pope Francis", in: *America Magazine*, 30 September 2013.

of Christ, is its most profound identity. It is an identity in which, as stated in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, “the ‘feminine’ element becomes a symbol of all that is ‘human’”,² and, for that reason, refers to self-giving as a response to God’s love: “In the Church every human being male and female is the ‘Bride’, in that he or she accepts the gift of the love of Christ the Redeemer, and seeks to respond to it with the gift of his or her own person”.³

The Holy Father stresses this spousal vocation of the Church that shows the value of self-giving in response to the love received and that translates it into choosing life and service and gratuity. This stimulates the feminine genius of the Church so that it may go forth, put aside all self-reference and reach out to all of humanity.

I am impressed by the kindness with which public opinion confirms the Church’s view. I am impressed because this confirms the feminine genius in those values, values that society itself questions and even ridicules when it specifically refers to women.

The current opening of public opinion to this ecclesiological concept gives us a key to affirm our truest essence. To educate women in self-giving is, in my view, a concrete way to take advantage of this possibility. It would also encourage the Church to shape its essence and identity as Mother and Shepherd. As Mary and the Church shed light on what it means to be a woman, then women themselves who live a life of self-giving, become prophets of the genuine nature of the Church, its vocation to travel through history, like Mary, giving everyone without exception the love that she herself receives freely and brings to fulfilment. According to Pope Francis, “We cannot imagine a Church without women, women active in the Church with the distinctive role that they play”.⁴

² JOHN PAUL II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 25. Hence the feminine genius of the Church does not at all mean conflict between its various dimensions (such as the Petrine and Marian, to use Balthasar’s terms), but their integration into a single underlying identity.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Press Conference with the Holy Father during the return flight from Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013.

Here are four keys that can chart a course for us to put into practice women's prophetic mission in the Church. It is to educate in self-giving through the 'overflowing' love that loved us first, the courageous proclamation of the truth, to look beyond that which the eyes perceive, and the concrete testimony of holy women.

1. The 'overflowing' love that loved us first

Self-giving is total when it responds to a love that is recognised as having come first. God always goes before us, as we are often reminded by the Pope. We women know that this reality is the basis for true commitment. Experience teaches us that if we are not in a love relationship, we give ourselves to ourselves and wear ourselves out to the point of emptying ourselves. This is a risk for which we pay a high price because we experience our commitment as frustration.

Self-giving is justified only when I do not get lost when giving myself. On the contrary, I find myself in a new way. The clearest example is physical motherhood. You cannot give life without giving yourself. The child is more than the mother's gift. The child is a new person, created from the love that the mother has received, accepted and safeguarded with the gift of her whole being. The same process takes place in spiritual motherhood. The gift of self creates something new, the result of the overflowing love that has been received. This is the mystery of the motherhood of the Church.

Self-giving through overflowing love is the key to understanding a Church-Mary and is the inner attitude that enables women to be prophets in the Church.

There are women who are or should be at the vanguard of this prophecy, because they are, or should be, experts in this inner attitude. I am referring to consecrated women.

For them, self-giving through overflowing love is their option in life.⁵

⁵ *Mulieris Dignitatem* 21 refers to this option: "Virginity according to the Gospel means renouncing marriage and thus physical motherhood. Nevertheless, the renunciation of this kind of motherhood, a renunciation that can involve great sacrifice for a woman, makes possible a different kind of motherhood: motherhood 'according

All consecrated women say yes to love with their soul and their body. They renounce physical motherhood to bear witness to that love through self-giving in prayer and in service, in committed proclamation of the Gospel, and in seeing others through the eyes of God's mercy. The Pope spoke of "the sisters who work hard and live a hidden sanctity".⁶

The consecrated woman is an "ecological reserve" of the Church, a concrete example of overcoming what seems to be a contradiction between self-giving and self-fulfilment, something that tends to be imposed by public opinion. At the same time, it is testimony that self-giving does not imply being available for everything, but for that which helps the human family to be more human. In that sense, the chastity of consecrated women is also prophetic because it dignifies and gives new value to women's bodies, so defiled by the consumer society.

I think that we as Church must all grow in our appreciation of women consecrated to God so that they may see self-giving to be prophetic and experience it with passion at the forefront of the Church-Mary. I am not referring to appreciation in the context of vocations ministry, but of a return to awareness of the huge "reserve" of love the Church possesses in consecrated women and the new life that comes through their self-giving. Certainly, it is an assessment that should start with oneself. However, the whole Church must grow in this respect, beginning with those who work closely with them in schools, hospitals, parishes and movements and bishops and clergy in general.

to the Spirit' (cf. *Rom* 8:4). For virginity does not deprive a woman of her prerogatives. Spiritual motherhood takes on many different forms".

⁶ A. SPADARO, "A big heart open to God: The exclusive interview with Pope Francis", op. cit.

2. The courageous proclamation of the truth

A second key is the courageous proclamation of the truth. There is no education without putting it into practice. Practice is not the only thing, but it is fundamental. We learn to walk by walking and to love by loving ... a useful refrain in the Schönstatt Movement. In order to live out our self-giving as part of our style, as prophecy for a Church that bears the face of Mary, we learn by putting it into practice.

A particular form of practice is to boldly proclaim what we believe and that of which we are convinced. It is the proclamation, above all, that life is a gift and you cannot live it fully without love. It is also that love is more than pleasure: it is the gift of self.

This proclamation is made in many ways. One of these is the word. I am naming this expressly because it is a fundamental contribution to the 'culture of encounter', another term used by Pope Francis as a key to opening the doors of the Church. Indisputable proof of our ability to communicate is the typical caricature of the gossiping woman, the archetype of emptiness.

Ridicule apart, women are facilitators in relationships because their way of communicating uses both reason and feeling. We have the ability to put our hearts into what we are saying. We put our passion and our whole selves. That is why our message is attractive and convincing and is able to give witness.

When a woman communicates honestly, she does not simply *say* something, but rather gives herself in what she is saying. The Holy Father said this when speaking of the Resurrection of Jesus: "The women were motivated by love and were able to accept this announcement with faith: they believed and passed it on straight away, they did not keep it to themselves but passed it on. [...] Women were the first witnesses. [...] This is part of the mission of women. [...] However this also makes us think about how women, in the Church and on the journey of faith, had and still have today a special role in opening the doors to the Lord, in following him and in communicating

his Face, for the gaze of faith is always in need of the simple and profound gaze of love”.⁷

3. *To look beyond that which the eyes perceive*

From this it follows that the gift of self is also expressed in the ability to go beyond what the eyes see.

In the context of proclamation, there is another potential that is implicit in our nature: the feminine genius enables us to see, as we heard the Pope say, with the simple and deep eyes of love, the original way of appreciating another, a key to opening their heart.

Women, facilitators of relationships, not only have a verbal communicative quality, but also inclusive vision. They can size things up as a whole, including the details, and therefore they are able to discover the original and pristine below the circumstantial. It is an ability of female intuition. Women may see deep and beyond what is perceived by the naked eye without implying an exclusion of reason. Seeing with the heart does not suppress logic or justice, but makes them truly human. “See everything; turn a blind eye to much; correct a little”. Pope Francis said as he quoted John XXIII.⁸

This way of seeing must be learned and practised. It is a way of looking at life that reaches a peak point in Mary. The wedding feast in Cana reminds us that, beyond purely rational observation, there is a way of seeing that integrates all human reality: “They have no more wine”. It is the prophecy of women in the Church, a prophecy of a Church–Mary.

That ability is a potential that God poured into our nature when he entrusted human beings to us. Maybe it was because God knew that when people are judged by what is seen with the naked eye, then what is seen is below their real dignity.

⁷ FRANCIS, General Audience, 3 April 2013.

⁸ A. SPADARO, “A big heart open to God: The exclusive interview with Pope Francis”, *op. cit.*

The most sublime expression of this way of seeing and of grasping reality is given in forgiveness. This is a word that, not surprisingly, is rooted in free and merciful self-giving

4. The concrete testimony of holy women

“May Christ the Lord never allow the Church to err in a matter of such importance ...”⁹

With these words, the Holy Father responds to the second petition made during the canonisation rite. This is followed by a prayer to the Holy Spirit before a holy person is elevated to the level of saint of the universal Church.

We could argue that it is not an issue of such importance since, even if the Church was mistaken in its judgement, this was surely a good person, even if not holy. However, the Church never interpreted holiness as a superlative level of goodness. Holiness includes goodness, but is not decided by it. What is important is a person’s self-giving in love. It is deep communion with God and with one’s brothers and sisters that gives the Church the moral certainty that a person has led a holy life. Goodness is certainly a characteristic that forms part of this communion, but communion is more than goodness. Communion is self-giving as an expression of outpouring love throughout one’s life, or the heroism of a martyr’s death for love of Jesus Christ.

The importance the Church gives to a holy life and to martyrdom shows how important this witness is.¹⁰

This reality presents us, as women, with the challenge of capitalising even more on the life and death of female figures recognised by the Church as saints and blessed. *Mulieris Dignitatem* says in this regard: “The witness and the achievements of Christian women have had a

⁹ “*Christus Dominus ne permittat errare Ecclesiam suam in tanto negotio*” (Rite of canonisation, second petition).

¹⁰ During the pontificate of Benedict XVI (2005–2013) 158 women were beatified, 18 were declared saints and one, Hildegard von Bingen, was proclaimed Doctor of the Church.

significant impact on the life of the Church as well as of society. Even in the face of serious social discrimination, holy women have acted 'freely', strengthened by their union with Christ. Such union and freedom rooted in God explain, for example, the great work of Saint Catherine of Siena in the life of the Church, and the work of Saint Teresa of Jesus in the monastic life. In our own days too, the Church is constantly enriched by the witness of the many women who fulfil their vocation to holiness. Holy women are an incarnation of the feminine ideal; they are also a model for all Christians, a model of the '*sequela Christi*', an example of how the Bride must respond with love to the love of the Bridegroom".¹¹

"Holy women are an incarnation of the feminine ideal" and, for that very reason, they offer us a pastoral opportunity to show their specific genius in an attractive way, beyond the charism and mission of each one.

The mystical experience and spiritual legacy of Hildegard von Bingen, proclaimed a Doctor of the Church on 7 October 2012, to name just one example, offers us a valuable pastoral key to explain the feminine genius in its capacity to be a bridge, not only between Creator and creature, but also between humans and creation. Her love of nature and the healing potential that she discovered in it are specific examples.

CONCLUSION: WOMAN, PROPHET OF THE CHURCH—MARY

To educate women in self-giving is to help the Church to live according to its identity. "The role of women in the Church is ... to be the icon of the Virgin, of Our Lady; what helps make the Church grow!"¹² Pope Francis tells us. To help the Church grow by being prophets of self-giving, and to be at the vanguard in its task to "warm

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 27.

¹² Press Conference with the Holy Father during the return flight from Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013.

the hearts of the people, to walk through the dark night with them, to know how to dialogue and to descend into the people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost",¹³ the Pope tells us.

Woman, through your self-giving you are showing us the meaning of Church.

God put this key in your hands.

*When you overflow with the love that loved you first,
when you give yourself in a proclamation that involves your whole life,*

*when you look upon each and every person with eyes filled with love,
when your self-giving is holiness of life and committed proclamation until death,*

you are a prophet and sentinel of a Church—Mary, a hope for the world.

¹³ A. SPADARO, "A big heart open to God: The exclusive interview with Pope Francis", op. cit.

The legal protection of life and family

JANE WATHUTA*

THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

This paper draws inspiration from the text and the theoretical framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter referred to as the UDHR), promulgated in 1948 in order to proclaim the basic natural rights that belong to every human being regardless of race, nationality, sex, religion, or social and economic position. The question of human rights and the ensuing obligations is in fact akin to human life itself because it has always been necessary to find some means of determining the scope of both rights and duties applicable to all. The 20th century nonetheless saw a collective appraisal of the wellbeing of the human person initiated by the League of Nations, followed by the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations Charter. These paved the way for the Commission on Human Rights, set up in 1946, and which after two years of study and deliberation would subsequently draft the UDHR.

This new declaration was absolutely the first pronouncement in history on the topic of human rights on a universal scale. The genesis of each article, and each part of each article, was a dynamic process in which many minds, interests, backgrounds, legal systems and ideological persuasions played their respective determining roles. It was projected as an elaboration of the words in the preamble of the United Nations Charter, “the worth and dignity of the human person”.

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Charles Malik, a Lebanese philosopher and diplomat, and one of the major contributors during the drafting process, regarded the text as humankind's greatest document. He rightly characterized the endeavour in terms of "man defining himself", as a recognition of the nature of the person as an individual and as a member of society, and an articulation of the most basic human goods and values in terms of rights. Others described it as a milestone in human progress. It has also been described as a potent critic of existing practice, a moral beacon, an educational tool, an appeal to conscience and a common standard of achievement. In the years that followed its proclamation, the UDHR became the most important reference point in the world for cross-cultural discussions of human freedom and dignity.

The affirmations of the Declaration that are of particular relevance to the discussion in this paper are the following:

- freedom, justice and peace are founded on the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family i.e. universality (Preamble),
- all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Article 1),
- everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person (Article 3),
- freedom from slavery or servitude (Article 4),
- freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 5),
- family entitlement to protection by society and the State (Article 16, 3),
- motherhood and childhood entitlement to special care and assistance (Article 25, 2),
- entitlement by all to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration can be fully realized (Article 28).

CONTEMPORARY THREATS TO LIFE AND FAMILY

In view of the above provisions, the next step is to look at two examples of contemporary global threats to life and family and then proceed to see how the UDHR can contribute to inspiring a more just society and a new civilization of love, with a specific emphasis on the role of women in this endeavour, as seen below. These two examples are drawn from the 23rd session of the Human Rights Council held in Geneva in May and June 2013. Both these agenda items either refer to the UDHR or reaffirm the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The Articles of the Declaration indicated above make it clear that its provisions apply, as already mentioned, to both men and women of all places and all times, irrespective of their social and economic position. Their ultimate basis is the dignity of every person in virtue of their belonging to the human race, which makes them part of their birth right. Under no circumstances should a person be enslaved, tortured or mistreated in any way, or for any reason.

Violence against women

The Human Rights Council addressed contemporary violations of human rights by, *inter alia*, advocating for the elimination of all forms of violence against women, as well as the prevention and response to rape and other forms of sexual violence. This phenomenon, which disproportionately affects women and girls, occurs in all spheres of society, in public and private life, in peace time, during periods of civil unrest or political transition, and in conflict and in post-conflict situations.

Legal measures exist in international law to curb the occurrence of violence against women. It is unlawful in all circumstances and in all places. For example, gender-related crimes and crimes of sexual violence are included in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Rape can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide or torture.

The enforcement of these provisions at national level depends however on States' compliance with the relevant obligations. Specific

recommendations for States in this regard have been made. These include the following:

- increased measures to protect women and girls from all forms of violence by addressing their security and safety, including through crime prevention laws, street lighting and improved urban planning, etc;

- ensuring that all forms of violence are criminalized in national law and take appropriate legislative and policy steps to ensure the prompt and adequate investigation, prosecution and accountability of perpetrators, including by strengthening the capacity of the criminal justice system;

- Ensuring that national laws and policies are in compliance with their international human rights obligations and are non-discriminatory and ensure women's access to justice, including by creating an enabling environment. This requires, *inter alia*, protecting confidentiality and privacy, and human rights training for law enforcement officials.

- Addressing long-term consequences faced by victims of rape and other forms of violence including legal discrimination and social stigmatization, as well as the effects on children.

The effective legal enforcement based on these recommendations nonetheless depends on the prompt reporting of cases and determined efforts to seek justice for these crimes. Huge obstacles stand in the way of making appropriate legal redress a reality. Among these are shame, stigma, fear of reprisals and negative economic consequences; inadequate investigations and prosecutions or a lack of accountability that reinforces social normalization of and tolerance for these crimes; the fact that crimes are often perpetrated or condoned by the State – military, police and related civilian personnel, including those involved in UN operations; and finally their link with deeper social problems such as ethnicity, as a form of ethnic cleansing, or to humiliate, dominate, instil fear, force relocation, or to intimidate, harass, or deter opposing forces.

Trafficking in persons

The second threat to life and family to be highlighted in this paper, also drawn from the 23rd session of the Human Rights Council, is the trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and efforts to combat human trafficking in supply chains of businesses. This is likewise a widespread phenomenon within and between regions and States and in supply chains of businesses. It involves a high number of victims, especially women and children who are often subject to multiple forms of discrimination and violence. It is linked with sexual exploitation or sex tourism, exploitative labour, illegal removal of organs, child pornography and paedophilia, and forced labour and services. These harsh realities are in clear contrast to the provisions of the UDHR, in particular the articles mentioned above, and cry for justice for the victims involved and their families. They amount to modern forms of slavery and servitude, and inhuman treatment, the kind of injustices that were endured and decried in the war and post war period leading to the foundation of the United Nations and the subsequent drafting of the UDHR.

Trafficking in persons is propagated by activities of transnational and national organized crime groups and is in itself a crime, both a violation of domestic laws and international law, and contrary to international standards. It co-exists or is further fostered by the high level of impunity enjoyed by traffickers and their accomplices, and a denial of rights and justice to victims.

International legal instruments to eradicate human trafficking have been signed and ratified by some State parties. These include:

– The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocols thereto, in particular the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and, – The Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The responsibilities of States have furthermore been outlined as follows:

- to sign and ratify these Conventions, if they have not already done so, and then fulfil the ensuing obligations under international law to prevent and combat trafficking,
- to establish comprehensive programmes to prevent trafficking,
- to enact and enforce legislation criminalizing trafficking,
- to investigate instances of trafficking and impose proportionate punishments on perpetrators, and ensure full respect for and protection of the human rights of victims of trafficking, and finally,
- To recognize trafficked persons as victims with specific protection needs, and ensure the promotion, protection and fulfilment of their human rights, including the right to an effective remedy for breaches of these rights.

The enforcement of the said provisions is without a doubt a long and laborious journey. Some of the supporting measures foreseen are:

- Intense capacity–building and training, including human rights and training for all relevant stakeholders (the police, immigration authorities, border patrol officials, labour inspectors, judges, prosecutors, lawyers and tax authorities, health and child welfare professionals...);
- More and better awareness–raising initiatives and adequate grievance mechanisms;
- Address the harmful attitudes, customs, practices, stereotypes... that underlie and perpetuate rape and other forms of sexual violence; and,
- Engage, educate and support men and boys to take responsibility for their behaviour and to become active partners in the prevention and elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, and to end the stigmatization of victims by encouraging a change in attitudes, norms and behaviour,
- Visible and sustained leadership to support effective prevention, engaging all segments of society, including community and religious leaders, civil society organizations, the private sector and the media. The goal is to foster prevention efforts targeting the general public to increase their understanding of the harmful effects of violence.

THE UDHR, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

The above recommendations bring us to the third section of this paper. How can the UDHR contribute to better intervention in favour of those who are vulnerable to violence and trafficking and thus ensure the genuine legal protection of life and the family?

As seen above, the Human Rights Council has made explicit reference to modes of intervention that go beyond strict legal measures and yet are a prerequisite as well as a further guarantee of the safety and security of both potential and actual victims. Some examples are addressing harmful attitudes, customs, practices and stereotypes, fostering the sense of responsibility of men and boys, and the need for suitable leadership.

This outlook is in harmony with the UDHR rationale regarding the need for a healthy society to act as a bulwark for effective human rights intervention. Malik, for example, spoke of the morally disturbing or judging as being far more important than the legally binding.¹⁴ He asserted that rights enforcement requires both the rule of law, as well as a healthy civil society. Therefore, as culture is prior to law, criminal prosecutions will have little effect on the basic causes of the conduct they aim to punish and deter unless men, cultures and nations first mature inwardly. Glendon too holds that formal legal decisions are only the results of the way people progress inwardly.¹⁵ Chang, the Chinese delegate and vice-chairman of the Commission on Human Rights and the drafting committee also affirmed that laws alone are not sufficient to bring about results by themselves. The main goal of the Declaration was actually to build up better human beings, and not merely punish those who violate human rights. Thus the reason the document is described as a moral beacon or a pedagogical tool, as mentioned above.

¹⁴ Cf. *The Challenge of Human Rights: Charles Malik and the Universal Declaration* (edited by Habib C. Malik), Charles Malik Foundation, Oxford 2000.

¹⁵ Cf. M.A. GLENDON, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, New York 2001; see also: IDEM, *Traditions in Turmoil*, Ave Maria University Press, 2006.

Another key element of the Declaration is that it explicitly protects and pays unique attention to the small settings or places such as families, schools, workplaces and religious and other associations. These are described as little seedbeds of character and competence, and are upheld along the lines of social thinkers like Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmund Burke. In the UDHR perspective, human rights education is possible from the early years because, as stated in Article 1 of the document, all human beings are endowed with reason and conscience, and are called to act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. The UDHR drafters understood and affirmed that nature and reason are the true sources of law and of a human rights mentality.

THE UDHR, MULIERIS DIGNITATEM AND THE LEGAL PROTECTION OF LIFE AND FAMILY

In the abovementioned settings, we find the woman, complemented by the man, as she exercises her task of safeguarding what is human. This occurs primarily within a family set-up as she nurtures, educates, and sustains; thankfully she is actively present in different spheres of society. In the family in particular she is gifted with the capacity to recognize and accept each member of the family – both male and female – for who he or she is. This talent also unfolds in her role as teacher particularly in the early school years. Nature has endowed her with the capacity needed to give this love.

Mulieris Dignitatem moreover speaks of the woman's moral and spiritual strength drawn from the intuitive awareness of the entrusting of the human being to her, *even in situations of social discrimination*.¹⁶ Even as she suffers hardship, violence and trafficking are pertinent contemporary examples, the woman is still called and capable of being a support and source of spiritual strength for other people owing to the great energies of her spirit. She is able to maintain sensitivity for humanity and for what is essentially human in every circumstance.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

John Paul II says that the history of every human being passes through the threshold of a woman's motherhood,¹⁷ and so she is irreplaceable in this regard, as society rises and falls according to the strength, vigour and love with which this task is accomplished.

Her capacity for love makes her a natural teacher, able to help those in her care to discern between good and evil, to understand what is right and to have the will to do it, to respect human nature and dignity. Thus she lays the foundation for the present and future legal protection of life and the family as she exercises her feminine talents, what Blessed John Paul II referred to as the "genius of women" i.e. the God-given feminine traits of self-gift, empathy and entrustment of the "other", meant to be used in the service of the Church and society, and especially within the family. Women who recognize and live their true vocation may have a formidable impact on all interpersonal relationships, be it as mother, wife, sister, daughter, friend or colleague, which will in turn be the basis for cultural transformation. Physical and spiritual motherhood lived authentically may be the catalyst for a lasting societal and cultural shift. Indeed, one's dignity is experienced not as a result of the affirmation of rights, but as the natural consequences of the concrete material, emotional, and spiritual care received in the heart of one's family.¹⁸

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 19.

¹⁸ Cf. IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 58; See also: JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*; J. MORSINK, *Inherent Human Rights: Philosophical Roots of the Universal Declaration*, Philadelphia 2009; UNITED NATIONS, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), downloaded from: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>; UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL Statement by Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, (2013) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/statements/statement-ezeilo.pdf>; UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, Statement by Ms. Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, (2013): <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/statements/statement-rashida-manjoo.pdf>.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Propositions for an effective presence in the world*

GIORGIA SALATIELLO

In order to draw some conclusions, Professor Alvaré and I tried to highlight the points that seem to us to be the most significant among those raised during the Seminar. We regard this meeting to be another point of departure and so we looked for ideas about where we can go from here. Each point that we shall try to recall immediately gives us an indication of what lies ahead. This is because we believe that the issues that surfaced are extremely important, and I think that this is significant for women, and for everyone for that matter. These are issues that relate in a broader sense to the whole of humankind, to tasks that involve not only women, but especially, considering the place where we are, the whole ecclesial community. It seems to us that we can certainly highlight that it is a logic that affects not only women.

The first aspect that struck us right from the start emerged from the talk by Monsignor Melina and then came up again later. It was the following: we spoke of the logic of love to counteract the logic of power. Here, however, lies the heart of the problem because we all know very well, unfortunately, what the logic of power is. Anyone can tell you what it is. However, what exactly the logic of love is, we believe, is a little less clear and less known. This was a theme that emerged and immediately gave us an indication for the future: to clarify this better for ourselves and to make it known. Everywhere you go people know the meaning of power. Every child learns it shortly after birth. Not everyone knows the rationale for love, and how can they know if we do not say it? It is true that there are publications on the subject, but very often they are known only to experts. We would

* Translated from the Italian transcription reviewed by the author

like to see something done that requires study and witness, and the subject of the logic of love really seems to us to be one of the priority issues.

Remaining on the theoretical level, another point to consider is the importance of a theology of the masculine and the feminine. Later this morning we are going to an audience with Pope Francis, and we already know that he has spoken, in his speeches and interviews, about the need for a thorough theological reflection on the subject of women. It is clear, however, that a theology of the feminine is inseparable from a theology of the masculine. It is not a question of adding a new treatise to theological treatises, although specific study is essential, but it is very necessary that attention be given across the board. Every theological theme must give this attention to the specific recipient of the message. Nobody as we heard again yesterday is a neutral abstract. Everyone is a man or a woman. No believer is a “neuter”, but is a male or a female believer. Hence the importance of a theology declined in the masculine and the feminine in two ways: it must remember the listener attention to the person receiving and also those who develop theological thinking because it needs the two voices of humanity. Compared to the past much has been done, but much remains to be done, as the Holy Father has said. We feel that this is another extremely important point.

We come now to a third point which is closely related to the previous one but is separate. It is also related to the Holy Father’s recent requests. What is our starting point today? We are starting from *Mulieris Dignitatem* and we have seen by the talks during the Seminar that this document is important, not just as a text, but at a deeper level as a stimulus for existence and for specific action that has been undertaken. That is all very well, but from now on we must go forward, take *Mulieris Dignitatem* as a basis to avoid repetition and to undertake future developments. We have this milestone, we were told. From this we must do some in-depth work on the message, but we must also advance with further reflection and action. This is a task that calls all of us at all levels because we must take up the text

and, progressing from there, continue to think. However, we must also use the indications that the text provides to take concrete action. The participants' views of the text that emerged over the past few days were extremely rich. This is another point that seems relevant.

We must include here at least a minimum of self-criticism. With specific reference to the talk by Professor Scaraffia – and this is true as an topic in itself and also as an example of a wider discourse – there emerged the subject of the so-called sexual revolution. Although it created many problems, it also produced in a roundabout way some positive results. We were reminded by the speaker of the attention now given to violence against women and the plight of single mothers. These were presented as missed opportunities, opportunities that we believers have wasted. Attention to these women had no need of the sexual revolution. They could have been reached through other more profound assumptions: ours. The insight that emerged here is very simple because it can be summarised in two words: look around! Let us look around and see where we can go to make a difference. Excuse me for speaking directly, but I do not mean that we should arrive late and criticise mistakes made by others, but we must try to arrive earlier to make a positive impact on all of these situations. The rich anthropology that supports us is immense and therefore we must draw on our heritage to develop something that is truly meaningful. Here at the Seminar we are speaking theoretically, but the participants are all people involved in the Church “field hospital”, as Cardinal Ryłko reminded us, and they know what we mean. It is precisely in this regard that opportunities like the one we are concluding today are so valuable. We each get to know what others are doing. This demonstrates the importance of communication among us and outwards towards others, but this is a topic that will be dealt with by Professor Alvaré.

Now I come to the last point, which we must deal with very quickly this morning, although there are many other issues that could be raised. In this framework, specifically, what is the task of the Pontifical Council for the Laity?

Propositions for an effective presence in the world

Three tasks, in our opinion, have emerged. The first is to implement the task of connecting, as we are experiencing now, so that no one feels alone and knows they are part of a living community. The second task is to facilitate ongoing dialogue, especially as there are so many means for this today. Finally, and this is the third task, to stimulate insights and look for opportunities to develop theoretical and operational themes that will gradually arise and be addressed.

New ways of communication for the new evangelisation¹

HELEN ALVARÉ

We are honoured to be part of this conversation and not only to come with the thoughts that we had, but to be inspired to think at this time together about the question of women and their vocations. When Professor Salatiello and I met yesterday, we were happy to find that our many notes were easily gathered under two general headings: first, the large theoretical ideas that need further development and specification and second, the theme of communications and how we go from what we said here to a new evangelisation about these matters, to communicating them to *particular* audiences, to adopting one particular tone versus another. We were able to isolate from our many notes four proposals or themes under the heading of “communications”. I will treat each of these below.

The *first*, and perhaps most often repeated notion, was the importance of having *positive* proposals about women to offer the world. To echo Professor Salatiello, I think every one of us here is convinced of the genius of the anthropology we consider here, of the depth of our tradition, of its sheer beauty. The more I read and reflect upon *Mulieris Dignitatem*, even twenty–five years after the fact, the more I realize that it has not lost its power, but in fact has new relevance and explanatory powers for the times at hand. Therefore I echo Professor Salatiello’s remark about seeking not to arrive at the conversation “one minute late”, but rather being early to the table, to the conversation, with our positive proposals. Women and societies have old questions that remain unsettled; they have new questions now that the experiment of the sexual revolution has been operating this

¹ Transcription from the recording, reviewed by the author.

last 50 years. As Professor Scaraffia pointed out so straightforwardly, the promises of the sexual revolution have not delivered: love and male–female relationships and marriage and parenting are not idyllic by a very long way. The situation is also more dramatic for the poor, particularly poor women, single mothers, the children who have not found their identity or their place in a solid family environment or community. Because the secular feminist revolution left many old questions unanswered, and because it raised so many new questions, there arise real opportunities for our gaining a hearing on our ideas concerning the attainment of authentic dignity and freedom and non–discrimination for women. There are many problematic sources who are only too willing to answer all questions about women; if we do not speak, they will fill all the space, they will claim to answer all the questions. We do not want to miss these opportunities.

The Church has innovative and dramatic proposals in favour of women following Jesus' examples in the Gospel. Here I refer to that marvellous part of *Mulieris Dignitatem* where John Paul II recites Jesus' wonderful encounters with the woman caught in adultery, with Martha, and with the Samaritan woman at the well, which he notes are among the most important theological exchanges in the Gospel. These are dramatic offerings of freedom to women who are not in situations of freedom. We need to make these proposals in our own time, these are proposals involving what Cardinal Ryłko referred to as “solid love”, as distinguished from temporary or liquid love. These are what Msgr. Melina so beautifully captured in his discussion about life–long love. This is to be distinguished from the instinct of romance, which is more about *me* than about *us* or about all of us, or about the importance (to the community and in salvation history) of woman's particular gifts for receptivity to new life and to all persons. It is important to make these positive proposals that women are free to accept, as distinguished from an uninterrupted practice of casting women generally as powerless victims of external forces and actors. We are not powerless. As the intervention from Nigeria so beautifully pointed out, we have not realised this utopian promise of sisterhood

but we women can do better than we have, and we know – as was discussed not only in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, but also in Pope Benedict's *On the Collaboration of Men and Women*² – that we will be more powerful not only if we are *together*, but if we bring men into this enterprise from the beginning, and strike a balance between making demands and sharing duties.

We need this new kind of solidarity and we need support from the Church in these efforts as we look for both a new masculinism and a new feminism *together* to meet the challenges of the day. Furthermore as we address women and men in the public square, we have to take care that the language in which we convey these new proposals is not confusing or confined to terms of art that we alone understand. It also cannot be self-referential.

We should not be afraid to make use of the media in these efforts. As one of our interveners stated in these past days: who is the media? It is people we know. It could be us, our children, or our friends. The media is part of our community too and we should not be afraid to treat them as such.

A *second* theme under the heading of communications is that there are many forms of communication which are not propositions *per se*. Rather, they are personal witness in many cases. Women love the telling of these witness stories about loss and success, about failure and resurrection. These include stories about the path from slavery to the freedom offered by the voice of the Church, the voice of Jesus Christ himself. They are stories detailing the path from the slavery of subjugation or violence against women, from the slavery of fear or self-hatred or bodily obsession... from worldliness, materialism, individualism, or contention with men... to the freedom of being a daughter of God. These testimonies from women to women (and it would be wonderful if we could get men to give their testimonies too)

² Cf. 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*, 31 May 2004.

are another form of communication. There is also the communication uniquely and powerfully accomplished by “being-with”, by presence, by simply loving the neighbour that God has given you. To cite the quotation by von Balthasar offered by Msgr. Melina, “only love is credible”. Thus the power of the *demonstration* of the feminine capacity for entrustment. We saw that this might be particularly necessary – this communication by loving presence – to young women and men moving through our educational institutions and our society who do not understand solid love in their own situations, whether at home or in school, ... who do not understand what it means to be loved unconditionally. Or perhaps they do not understand from the media, from the entertainment industry, from the Internet, ... what is a man; what is a woman; what do they have in common; how do they operate as men and as women; and what does it mean to love one another as man and as woman. We had beautiful testimonies from married women about how it was that, as their life was unfolding, the company of the Church – whether in conversations with priests or religious, or documents, or sacraments – helped them to understand the life that was unfolding before them and what the “custodianship” of their children meant. Finally, there was mentioned even the possibility of communication by a willingness to suffer publicly for Jesus Christ, by our observation of martyrdom to live out our vocation to the cause of the human person as we understand it.

The *third* aspect of communication we discussed was about how lay women and religious women have opportunities commensurate with their platforms – with their expertise, with their knowledge, with their spheres of influence – to undertake communication *in* the Church but also *beyond* the Church. They are, by definition, the voice *ad extra*, the voice of Catholic women, who know their field, the language of their field and the sensibilities of their field. They also know the terms of art used by the Church that the world does not understand, and they possess as lay experts, the possibility for communicating in each of their fields of influence.

Fourth and finally we identified some particular subject matters within this question of the vocation of women that require further sustained thought, and particular ingenuity to support successful communication.

The *matter of complementarity* is a subject that is very fraught, very neuralgic in the world. How do we explain that this is not biological reductionism, not a fractionalising of the image of God, that it is not elevating one sex over another, but rather a very inadequately explored gift of God not only as between a man and a woman in a romantic or marital relationship, but in *every* field of action in the world, given that we are together everywhere in the world? We have the additional fact that women are not only doing things that they used to do in the traditional professions, but that they are today doing things men *alone* used to do. But the language of complementarity has an enormous amount of baggage; it is the proverbial over-loaded camel trying hard to get through the eye of the needle that is the entry point to the world's understanding.

Another difficult subject to communicate without generating negative feedback is the *matter of the good of women's care-taking*, service, nurturance, of children, and of the elderly, not only in their personal lives, but also in the fields that women disproportionately populate: medicine, law, social work, teaching and health-care. Why do we as women make these choices disproportionately to spend more time caring for other people when we are often unpaid or underpaid? We need to generate effective messages at a social level about these things. When there is talk about the Church being loving and nurturing like a mother, there is a great deal of positive feedback. When there is talk about individual women doing the same, there is resistance. It is objected that "care" is subservient, care is underpaid or unpaid. Why is it that what we love about our Mother the Church we cannot love about the individual woman's actions in the world?

These are some particular areas of communication we identified as fraught and in need of our particular attention.

Some final considerations*

STANISŁAW RYŁKO

The Seminar on the theme “God entrusts the human being to the woman” has been a real laboratory of wonder and hope. Throughout this time together, I believe that everyone has felt great amazement at the beauty of God’s plan contained in the act of creation of the human being as presented in the book of Genesis: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Genesis* 1: 27). Here is the deepest root of the truth about humankind and our immense dignity and transcendent vocation which in every season of life we are called to discover again and again. In this way, despite the passage of years, the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* by John Paul II continues to be a useful and safe compass to which we can refer.

However, in our times the discovery of the beauty of God’s plan for men and women has become a real challenge. Postmodern culture, which dominates the world stage, spreads and imposes in different ways rules of behaviour and ways of life clearly inconsistent with those transmitted by the Judeo–Christian tradition. Today, even the very nature of the human being as man and woman is called into question, and so too are the basic institutions of society such as marriage and the family. We are witnessing a kind of “globalisation of hegemonic uniformity” that is characterised by a “single way of thinking” or “weak thought” which Pope Francis has mentioned more than once.¹ Such

* Synthesis of the talk given by Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko at the conclusion of the Seminar.

¹ Cf. FRANCIS, “We do not negotiate our fidelity to God”, morning meditation in the chapel of *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 18 November 2013; IDEM, “Free thought”, morning meditation in the chapel of *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 29 November 2013.

thinking is imposed very effectively through various sophisticated “hidden mechanisms of persuasion” available to centres of worldly power.² This is what causes an increasing climate of confusion and anthropological disarray that generates “liquid” female and male identities that are immature and childish. This is an extremely serious challenge to which we Christians must not remain indifferent. We are called to react; but how? In an open letter written by Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio in 2010 to support a demonstration against the possibility of the enactment of a law on the marriage of persons of the same sex in Argentina, he explained: “It will not be an act against anyone, because we do not want to judge those who think and feel differently. However [...] we are clear that what is different cannot be considered equal. In society we need to accept differences. [...] We Christians act as servants of the truth and not as its owners.”³ It was this attitude that we wished to take during our Seminar. We were aware of being humble servants and witnesses of the truth about humankind that was entrusted to us by divine revelation and the Tradition of the Church.

However, there is another aspect that deserves to be studied further. Crisis situations often favour the emergence and proliferation of pessimistic and even catastrophic views of history. This happens even today in the context of the anthropological crisis. There is a dramatic multiplication even among Christians of prophets of doom, while the world is in urgent need of credible prophets of hope. Again Pope Francis comes to our aid when he says that “in the face of this crisis, there can be resignation, pessimism about the possibility of taking any effective action. In a certain sense it is ‘calling us out’ of the same dynamic as the present historical turning point, by denouncing its more negative aspects with a mindset similar to that spiritual and theological movement of the second century A.D. that was called ‘apocalyptic’.

² Cf. IDEM, “Free thought”, *cit.*

³ J.M. BERGOGLIO, *Solo l'amore ci può salvare*, Città del Vaticano 2013, 127–129.

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We are tempted to think in apocalyptic terms. This pessimistic understanding of human freedom and of the process of history leads to a kind of paralysis of mind and will. Disillusionment also leads to a kind of escapism, to looking for ‘islands’ or a reprieve”.⁴ The Pope continued, “At this point we wonder: is there a way forward in our present situation? Should we resign ourselves to it? Should we allow our hope to be dimmed? Should we flee from reality? [...] I not only think that there is a way forward, but also that the very moment in history which we are living urges us to seek and find paths of hope that open our society to new horizons”.⁵

For this reason we wanted this seminar to be a laboratory of hope. It is true that in various parts of the world there are still many incidents of discrimination and even violence against women. We must of course denounce these facts, but that is not enough. It is necessary above all to take concrete action in defence of the dignity of women and their rights. It seems that in general there is movement in that direction. During our meeting we learned about so many projects and initiatives promoted by women and for women that take place in the world. These are real signs of hope for all of us. However, there is often a risk that these activities remain hidden or isolated, or continue to be produced by solo navigators. That is why there was a call made here at this meeting to strengthen bonds of friendship and to intensify communication afterwards so that we can learn to collaborate and work in a network. Only in this way can we spread more effectively the high vocation and mission that God has created for man and woman.

The topic addressed by the seminar is not a beautiful utopia to be left in the drawer. It is our task, as Christians, to be proactive courageous heralds of this message, not only in interpersonal relationships, but also in the public domain. This is certainly not an easy task. Today we are witnessing the spread of strong militant secularism that is relegating

⁴ FRANCIS, Meeting with the academic and cultural world in Cagliari, Italy, 22 September 2013.

⁵ *Ibid.*

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faith to the strictly private sphere. The dominant culture allows us to be Christians as long as we keep it private. However, if we comply with that request, we become invisible “insipid” Christians, like salt that loses its flavour or a hidden light that cannot be seen. Jesus told us “You are the salt of the earth [...] You are the light of the world [...] let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Cf. *Mt* 5: 13–16). The new evangelisation which is so much talked about is today, in particular, about transmitting to humanity the beauty of God the Creator’s plan for men and women.

It is my hope, therefore, that each of us, at the end of this seminar, is strengthened in hope. Let us not fall into the trap of feeling that we are a minority suffering from an inferiority complex who almost apologise for existing. We have a message of great importance to be transmitted to the world and we must not keep it hidden. Pope Benedict XVI explained that it is true that Christians are a minority in the world, but a creative minority. He said, “I would say that usually it is creative minorities who determine the future, and in this regard the Catholic Church must understand that it is a creative minority that has a heritage of values that are not things of the past, but a very lively and relevant reality”.⁶

The seed of the Word was thrown far and wide during our meeting. We are very grateful to the Holy Father for his wise and incisive address and we thank all the speakers who have made an important contribution to our work. The real protagonist and main sower was the Holy Spirit present among us. The Spirit guided and led us and inspired our reflections, and now we are being sent out to the world. Let us accept this mandate with joy. Let us safeguard the seed of the Word we have received and allow it to blossom and bear abundant fruit.

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Interview during the flight to the Czech Republic, 26 September 2009.

APPENDIX

Women in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy**

FRANCO NEMBRINI

At school I need a full term to explain the first three verses of *The Divine Comedy*, so you can understand the problem I have now... I will try, however, to set out what seems to me the way that women are portrayed in the *Divine Comedy*. This is, I believe, the reason for which I was asked to give this talk. Obviously I can only give some intimations of the subject, but let us try anyway. Please be patient with me...

In my opinion, the most interesting thing about Dante's entire *Divine Comedy* is that its theme is basically about the relationship between a man and a woman, the relationship between Dante and Beatrice. For those who know the *Divine Comedy* this is in some ways a truism, and yet it may not be so clear. Although school textbooks say things about Beatrice and the relationship between Dante and Beatrice that are justified in terms of the literal, exegetical, historical and literary, yet they do not say the most decisive thing, in my opinion, which is that Dante's *Divine Comedy* was preceded by an earlier work called *Vita nova* in which it had its origin and its explanation.

Someone asked me if Dante had ever said why he wrote the *Divine Comedy*, and I said of course he had. He said so on several occasions and many times in the text of his masterpiece. Even in some of his letters he had occasion to say: I have written, I write this work "to profit that world which lives badly",¹ to help the world that is in bad

* The Italian text was transcribed from the recording and reviewed by the author who chose to maintain the "narrative" style used at the Seminar.

¹ D. ALIGHIERI, *The Divine Comedy*, "Purgatorio", XXXII, 103. All translation in English from: *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. A Verse Translation by Allen Mandelbaum*, New York-Toronto 1982-1986.

shape. I am reminded of what was said today, that we live in times that we call bad, but the Romans in their time said *mala tempora currunt*. Even Dante realised that the world was not going well and he said that he wrote the *Divine Comedy* to help the world to be a bit more right and a bit more true. In another passage he says: all my work and every part of my work is intended to help people to move from the state of misery to the state of happiness. Well now, for the sake of brevity I will talk in a very simple, very unpolished way, the way in which, by the way, I read Dante to my students, so please have plenty of mercy.

We must make an effort to imagine what a guy like Dante in his younger years could ordinarily experience in the cultural climate of the Middle Ages and the Italian Middle Ages in particular. With an effort of our imagination we must try to imagine Dante in his era. Let me remind you that those were the years of Saint Francis. There was no television, no newspapers, no megaphones, no nothing. A few years later the “Chapter of Mats” took place with five thousand men, young men, who had decided to follow him. So, when I say this about Dante, I am describing in some way the medieval Christian man. This is a man, still young, who gets up in the morning, walks down the streets of his city and is familiar with a kind of thinking that we no longer know. We have lost it along the way, as we have said many times at this Meeting. He could experience life as tension towards the good, towards greatness, to the absolute. Dante closes the three parts of the *Divine Comedy* with the word “stars”. The *Inferno* ends with the line “we emerged, to see – once more – the stars”; the *Purgatorio*: “Pure and prepared to climb unto the stars”; the *Paradiso*: “The Love that moves the sun and the other stars”. Now, as Dante never put even a comma at random, this is an important poetical sign. What does it mean? It means simply this: in this work, I want to talk to you about me, of what I understand of life, and therefore of you; I want to speak to you of my heart and yours; I want to tell you about the great desire with which God has put every person into the world, and that is the desire of the eternal and the infinite. I tell the children at school: guys, you have a really interesting problem. It is to know if life is a huge rip–

off, a big lie, a big deception, or if everything that you love, everything that you value and all that draws you will last forever, that it will be safe, that is, if you have or have not a relationship with the “stars”. Dante challenges you to take a path and go to find out if things are so, that is, whether life is safe or not. His personal story starts with an encounter with a girl, a story so decisive that he himself, when he takes it up and recounts it, says that it was the beginning of his conscious life: “In that part of the book of my memory ... I find the words written ...”² and he speaks about meeting Beatrice when he was nine. Nine years means through all the symbolism of numbers of *The Divine Comedy* from the beginning. Ever since I had reached the age of reason, I felt an invincible attraction for this attractive girl and I kept it for a long time as I waited for the time to ripen and allow it to flourish and so unveil its meaning. So, at eighteen, twenty, twenty-two years of age, imagine this guy who gets up in the morning experiencing life as desire, a desire for happiness. He himself would describe it as a desire for happiness with which God puts human beings on earth, because we all come to the world with the feeling that life is a great promise of good, a great promise. He would describe this promise in three dimensions, taking three aspects: we would need to know the truth, to know whether there is such a thing as a good destiny, if God exists and who is this God. However, this would not be enough. This truth, if it exists, must give form to life and to the relationships of life. It must become something good, something good that is practised, mature feelings and true friendship. Therefore it would be necessary, if it is possible to know the truth and to do good, for life to be beautiful and positive, to feel the usefulness of passing time, useful for oneself and for our fellow human beings, useful in the sense of the common good. These are the three dimensions of humankind that Dante details and explains. They are, I think, the three dimensions in which human beings recognise that they resemble God. This is because to say this means truth, goodness and beauty.

² IDEM, *The New Life*, I, 1, translated by C.E. Norton, Boston 1867, 1.

It means faith, charity and hope, which are the three theological virtues, the three characteristics of God that human beings find in themselves as tension, as invincible tension. Dante realises that he is attracted to this happiness in his relationship with a woman, and he expects that through this relationship he will find happiness in life. She is called Beatrice which etymologically means “bearer of bliss”, “possibility of happiness”.

It happens one day that this girl, whom he meets on the street, declares herself in the poetic form of the new style, that is, she does not say “Dante, I love you” ... She smiles. She smiles! It is a smile ... and in that smile Dante understands Beatrice as if she had said: yes, I am for you, I am meant for you, I am good for you and am the possibility of good for you. At this declaration, Dante freaks out! He does not understand anything anymore. He goes home, writes poetry, he writes to friends, he wonders about what is going on and understands that the love of which this girl is the bearer is giving him new life. He gave the name *The New Life* to the collection of poems that he wrote in praise of this girl who was changing his life and changing it in so radical a way that he said: from that day forward I could no longer feel enmity for anyone because everything suggested forgiveness and mercy to me. Indeed, it never again happened that my life was without the faithful counsel of reason, so that if anyone on the street asked me anything, my answer would always be: love, love! *Amor, amore, onne cosa conclama* (Love love, everything cries out) said Jacopone da Todi.³ So Dante describes his life that has been brought to this good, and he feels, somehow, that Beatrice has made it possible. There is more. What excites him and moves him to tears? The intuition that this can actually happen: that in this girl, in his relationship with her, everything can be accomplished, the desire to know God, that she may be the flesh of God in his life, that meeting her is to meet Jesus, his Lord, and therefore, in her and with her, life can be fulfilling and

³ JACOPONE DA TODI, *Como l'anima se lamenta con Dio de la carità superardente in lei infusa*, Lauda XC, v. 260.

all desire for good, knowledge of the truth, the practice of good and beauty can bloom.

The only thing is – to be brief – it happens, as you know, that Beatrice dies. She dies because our lives contain death within them. Everything dies. As I say to the kids: look, it is not that I want to put a jinx on you and tell you that your beloved, your girlfriends will die, even though it is true ... The fact is that every relationship contains something of death within it, something rotten, something that limits it. When Dante, however, finds himself at the junction where we all find ourselves, he, unlike modern human beings who deal with death with desperation, he does not stop. We remember, at least the Italians here should know this, the great cry of modernity when faced with death that was poetically rendered in a way unmatched by Giacomo Leopardi. At the death of Silvia the same situation faced by Dante and faced by me, he shouted out, *O natura, o natura, perché di tanto inganni i figli tuoi, perché non rendi poi quel che prometti allor?* (O nature, O nature, why you have deceived your children for so long, why do you not grant them what you promised them back then).⁴ Why did you promise us happiness? Why did you put us in the world with hope for good that life would then betray? Why must life be a huge rip-off? However, the Christian Dante does not stop. He does not stop when he becomes aware of death. He goes home and tries to understand because he senses that there is something about Beatrice, about the feminine principle, about woman, that he has missed. He goes home and rearranges his poems and adds comments to explain them to himself and to the reader. He puts them in order and tries to understand the mysterious story of that relationship. At the end of the *Vita Nova* he wrote the last poem and then said “After this sonnet, a wonderful vision appeared to me”.⁵ I believe that Dante was holy and had mystical visions of deep mysticism. He will never be canonised, probably, having put a number of popes, bishops, priests and nuns

⁴ G. LEOPARDI, *A Silvia*, *Canti*, XXI, vv. 36–39.

⁵ D. ALIGHIERI, *The New Life*, XLIII, cit. 96.

in hell, but that is a relatively minor issue. He was certainly holy. He wrote “a wonderful vision appeared to me, in which I saw things which made me resolve to speak no more of this blessed one, until I could more worthily treat of her”. I mean, he swore to himself: I shall write no more about her until I have figured out that thing that is escaping me. There is something about the relationship between man and woman, between me and this dead girl. There is something that I did not understand, something of the mystery of being which escapes me. I shall talk no more of her until I understand. “And to attain to this, I study to the utmost of my power, as she truly knoweth”, and I shall dedicate my life to this. My life will be consecrated to trying to understand this mystery. “So that, if it shall please Him through whom all things live, that my life shall be prolonged for some years”: so, if God will give me life and enough time, “I hope to say of her what was never said of any woman”:⁶ I hope to be able to say about Beatrice what has never been said in the world and in the history of the world about any woman. The holiness and mystery of God! All school books say that Dante, here, is referring to the fact that he will speak of Beatrice in a poetically perfect way ... But no, it is not so! The issue is that Dante feels he has grace in his hands, a special gift which is the understanding of what woman is in Christian revelation, that is, from Christ onwards. He feels it with clarity, with a force of experience and judgment through which he could say of Beatrice that which he could never have said before of any woman. He is aware of this and works all his life on this. “And then may it please Him who is the Lord of Grace that my soul may go to behold ...”. Think about it, I always tell the kids at school, here Dante is saying: and then when I die, I hope God will give me the joy of going to heaven to see what? God! No no ... For Dante, if there is a heaven, it will be perfect union with his Beatrice. He does not want to go to heaven to see God. He wants to go to heaven to see the glory of God expressed in what he loved, that is, in his woman! “And then may it please Him

⁶ *Ibid.*, 96–97.

who is the Lord of Grace, that my soul may go to behold the glory of its lady, namely of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory looketh upon the face of Him *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*⁷ who is blessed throughout all the ages, because finally I am going to enjoy the love of my woman eternally and forever, illuminated and fulfilled through the glory of God. I shall be able to admire the face of Beatrice who admires the very face of God. This is heaven. If there is a heaven, it is the fulfilment of this!

Dante really would be silent for ten years. He wrote other things that were left unfinished. He left them half done because his soul was following this task, this vocation. It was only about ten years later that he began to take pen and paper to write that which in ten years of studies and philosophy, and also I think of prayer, frequenting great theological schools and convents and abbeys, he now understood. There was also exile, you know, because he was driven from his city to which he would never return. It was precisely for that reason, thanks to God for exiling him, that he could spend his life, those ten years of personal asceticism, in trying to understand. At a certain point he believed that he understood, and he took pen and paper and gave the world the adventure of human beings in a way that has not, I believe, any real equal.

Now I shall just make a few very short points. Just think how he put together an incredible body of work with the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*: a hundred *cantos*, thirty-three for each *cantica*, plus one that serves as an introduction. The first *canto*, like any introduction, is decisive, because it declares the nature of the journey and the nature of the work and the condition. You all know how it starts: "When I had journeyed half of our life's way ..." ⁸ Our! We are all being pulled in. "I found myself within a shadowed forest, for I had lost the path that does not stray". The first thing that a man loyal to himself must do is to admit to being blind and to need to see: Lord, that I may see.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸ IDEM, *The Divine Comedy*, "Inferno", I, v. 1.

This is the human condition. We are all, like the blind man of Jericho, leaning against a wall begging to be able to see, because without light, life becomes evil, becomes ill, becomes violent, and one does bad things without wanting to. If we do not see things, we crash into them and we break everything. Life in the dark wood is hell and it is death. Dante says, “I found myself within a shadowed forest, for I had lost the path that does not stray [...] So bitter – death is hardly more severe”. Impressive. “But to retell the good discovered there, I’ll also tell the other things I saw”. However, do not be afraid even of your badness, because if you have the courage to look at it, to face your badness, this is your starting point. Jesus was recognised by sinners, by those who were in need, lepers and paralytics. We must start from here because here within is where we experience the need for God. Then Dante says: now I shall talk about the dark forest and death which is to live without God and without light; but be aware that you have to start from here. Dante says he can see a light on the hill. He tries to go alone, that is, to save himself with his own strength, but a lion, a leopard and a wolf, three ferocious creatures, prevent him from reaching the light. It is the ancient parable of Icarus who is unable to free himself through his own efforts and to reach the sun through his own efforts. He finds himself pushed back into the dark forest and, suddenly, there is a shadow in front of him, a presence. This is the page that I love the most because it is the beginning of everything, and always the beginning of each day. Dante’s first words in the *Divine Comedy* are: “‘Have pity on me’ [...] ‘whatever you may be – a shade, a man’:⁹ have mercy on me, someone have mercy on me! This cry, this request, “have pity on me”, is the beginning of each day, and the beginning of all life, and the beginning of adventure, always! Have mercy on me, help me, for alone I can do nothing. This shadow reveals itself to be Virgil, the great poet of antiquity. He says, look, Dante, you are right. We should go up there to the hilltop, to the light, but it is not possible because you are on the wrong road.

⁹ *bid.*, v. 65.

The goal is correct, but you are making it too easy. You have to make a long journey and you will need to be aware of all of your failings, so you must visit hell. Then you will have to battle to overcome those failings in purgatory, and then you will have access to a life full of goodness and beauty, but you have to follow the whole process. "It is another path that you must take, if you would live this savage wilderness".¹⁰ Dante responds enthusiastically: I agree. Let's go. He decides to leave, but in the second *canto*, impressive and beautiful, he is gripped by fear. Or rather, it is not by fear so much as by an understanding that the Christian life is a battle. It is for manly men. He understands that *vita homini militia est*, as they said in the Middle Ages. It is a battle and one gets scared, and so the second *canto* begins in this way: "The day was now departing; the dark air released the living beings of the earth from work and weariness; and I myself alone prepared to undergo the battle both of the journeying and of the pity ...".¹¹ He realises that life will be a war and is a war. It is not a war of weapons, but rather a war of the way, that is, of a decision to be taken about the route that can be difficult. However, a road must be chosen, the way of the journey and of mercy, great pity for oneself and for our fellow human beings. Then he says: no, I cannot do it; no, who am I to try a road like that. And, as we all do, as an excuse to justify our cowardice, what does he say? What we all say: I am not worthy, I am not able. If there were different conditions perhaps it would be possible, but who am I to be asked? ... He even says to Virgil: no, look, Virgil, you were wrong. Two have already gone to make this trip, Aeneas and Saint Paul. Aeneas was to found the Roman Empire and Saint Paul the Catholic Church, but who am I? "For I am not Aeneas, am not Paul. Nor I nor others think myself so worthy".¹² No one can ask me to take on this battle. This is a great bit because Virgil gets angry and says: coward, "your soul has been assailed by

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vv. 91. 93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, vv. 1–5.

¹² *Ibid.*, vv. 32–33.

cowardice”.¹³ Now, so that you can find the courage to live, to assume your responsibilities, now I shall tell you a story. I tell you this because you found me there in the depths of the dark forest. Did you think that I was out walking just searching for mushrooms in the forest, and you found me by chance? ... You should know – I am telling the story like this briefly so that we can come to the point – you need to know dear Dante, Virgil says, that I was quietly in limbo playing a game of cards with Homer, Lucan and Ovid. We were playing a game of poker together and I certainly was not thinking about you and your problems. It is just that a beautiful girl arrived, “her eyes surpassed the splendor of the star’s”.¹⁴ This beautiful girl came running, out of breath, towards me. She said: Virgil, are you not ashamed? Your disciple, who gave his life to the study of your works, is down in the dark forest and you are here playing cards with friends? Why do you not run to give him a hand? Virgil says: lady, I am going, I am going, I am going right away, but first, tell me, who are you and why are you so anxious about this Dante? The young lady turns out to be Beatrice. She says: I am Beatrice. I am his girlfriend, so be patient. I am his girlfriend and I am concerned about this guy. You have to go down and give him a hand. Hurry! Virgil says: but how did you find out that Dante was in trouble. Then Beatrice says: I really had not noticed and I did not care at all. I was drinking tea with my friend Rachel and I was minding my own business when a saint arrived, all agitated, and said to me: Beatrice, shame on you. Your boyfriend is below in the dark forest and you do not do anything to help him! I said: lady, look, I am going. I shall try to do something. But who are you, and who told you ... She said: I am Saint Lucy, the patron of Dante and of the power of sight, that is, of light. I am Saint Lucy, Dante’s protector, and he is close to my heart. Do something. Then Beatrice says to Saint Lucy: and you, lady, how did you know that Dante was in trouble ... Ah, says Saint Lucy, I was not bothered about this either. In fact, I had not

¹³ *Ibid.*, v. 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 55.

noticed it at all ... but Our Lady called for me, I was called by Our Lady herself. She called me and said: Saint Lucy, your protégé is down there and you do not do anything...

In conclusion, Virgil says to Dante: are you not ashamed? Now that I have told you that “there are three such blessed women concerned for you within the court of Heaven”,¹⁵ that is, now that you know that three women: Mary, who is the only one who noticed it because she is the Mother of the Church and of all the living, is the one who called Saint Lucy to rescue you, and she called Beatrice to rescue you, and she called Virgil to rescue you, that is says Virgil she called me, and I came to get you ... Now, try again to tell me: I am not worthy, I am not able ... And indeed Dante says: ready! This time let us go. And they really did go! The journey can finally start because Dante becomes aware of this incredible infinite motherhood that he has always felt in the life of the Church. This is not in the abstract, but rather in women and in the women whom he has loved and whom he has met. I shall conclude by pointing out an incredible thing that will happen later in *Paradiso*. Dante travels through *Inferno* and all of *Purgatorio* ... but the most moving thing happens in *Paradiso*. Dante visits hell and purgatory aided by Virgil, and then, beyond *Purgatorio*, he comes to the terrestrial *Paradiso*. Here Virgil disappears and Beatrice arrives. It is a terrible meeting because Beatrice insults him and treats him so badly that poor Dante has recourse to the angels that are around. They say: Beatrice, you are going too far. Stop it ... look, you are really overdoing it ... Beatrice says: no, no, no, now he must tell us about the whole matter ... In short, Beatrice is forcing a confession from Dante. That is a wonderful thing, because before even beginning to visit the last piece of paradise together, she forces him to understand, with an argument of extreme rationality, the terrible mistake he had made. She says: Dante, were you not in love with me? Yes. Was I not the biggest asset of your life? Yes. But could I have made you really happy? No, says Dante, because you are dead. Right, says Beatrice.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vv. 124–125.

That should have warned you that only God fulfils the expectations of human beings, of which I have been a sign and instrument. But you, in view of the fact that I am dead, you should have acknowledged with even greater certainty the need for God. Instead, what did you do? Disappointed by what you thought of as the greater good, you turned to inferior things. But do you realise that this was nonsense and that you were being irrational?

Dante apologises, is forgiven and begins the journey in heaven where something I regard as incredible happens. As they journey through the nine heavens, Dante continuously observes Beatrice and understands her, recognises her and learns – in heaven after heaven and *canto* after *canto* –, who Beatrice is. In the description that he slowly gives, he uses terms that I am still studying because this is a relatively recent discovery. He uses words, attributes and adjectives that gradually make her similar to that which Dante will say in the thirty-third *canto* of *Paradiso*, at the end of the work, about Mary. So: Beatrice is the presence of Mary in Dante's life. Every woman is the presence of Mary in the life of a man, that is, she is the possibility of good and the possibility of happiness. This is how this wonderful thirty-third *canto* ends, with the prayer of Saint Bernard to Our Lady, a prayer that many of you know. It is a moving prayer because Dante asks Saint Bernard to request Mary to let him see God, that immense light ... Saint Bernard says to Mary: Look, Mary, this guy has done the whole tour and now he would like to see God. Let us bring him right to the end. He asks Mary for this grace, to be able to lift his eyes "towards the ultimate salvation",¹⁶ so that life may be supreme joy. This is precisely the word used. However, the request is preceded by this hymn to Our Lady which I always read with great emotion. Let me remind you of the first few lines: "Virgin mother, daughter of your Son, more humble and sublime than any creature, fixed goal decreed from all eternity, you are the one who gave to human nature so much nobility...". Mary, a woman, is the one who made human nature so

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, "Paradiso", XXXIII, v. 27.

noble “that its Creator did not disdain His being made its creature”.¹⁷ God who created her also became a created human being. You should read and study these words. It took me a long time to realise that these words do not only describe Mary, but that they are words that describe us. It describes Christians. When I was young I said, “Virgin Mother”? ... Either a virgin or a mother ... Only Our Lady can be both. However, this is not so. We are all virgin and mother, you said so during this Seminar. There is a kind of chastity and virginity in the conjugal act, in the act of love that makes it fruitful and true according to the destiny for which God had made it. Similarly, there is fruitfulness in virginity. There is extraordinary generation. Pope Francis told religious sisters to be generators of life.¹⁸ The Church has called priests “father” and nuns “mother” for centuries, recognising that true fatherhood and true motherhood belong to God. We are all putative fathers, as the catechism said of Saint Joseph. “Virgin mother, daughter of your Son...”: I always thought that only Our Lady could be the daughter of her Son. It took a while, but then, it was a great discovery in my life. As a young man I thought that the most beautiful thing in the world would be to get married, but then that passes quickly. Then I thought that the most beautiful thing in the world would be to become a dad, and that lasted longer because it really is a wonderful thing. However, there is something even bigger that can happen in the life of a parent: to become a child of their own children. It is our children who regenerate their father to life by forgiving him and choosing, deciding, loving and living a magnitude that the parent comes back to learning and following. We can be children of our children. The whole hymn to Our Lady is a description of human perfection that only Christ could bring to history and that finds in Mary the certitude and promise of what has already happened, because Mary is already that which each of us is called to be. After that, the impressive journey

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, vv. 1–6.

¹⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, Address to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the International Union of Superiors General, 8 May 2013.

begins through which Dante, at three different levels, is allowed to see the very nature of God.

Let me make one last observation which is a bit funny but not too much. Saint Joseph, the husband, is not there. Throughout *The Divine Comedy* he is not mentioned. There are all the saints possible but there is no Saint Joseph. Yet he is there! He is hidden and discreet. As in the Gospels, he is silent. You know that in the Gospels Saint Joseph never speaks. It is as if he were a discreet presence behind Mary to support the task of upbringing, education and forgiveness. We could say that Mary could not live without her husband. However, her husband is rarely seen from this point of view. He is always a little hidden behind her. Dante wrote the thirty-third *canto* of *Paradiso*, the hymn to Our Lady, and ended with a triplet that says: "In you compassion is, in you is pity, in you is generosity, in you is every goodness found in any creature". It begins with the letter "i". This is the last triplet of the canonical hymn. Later on in the *canto* the successive triplets start with the letters: i, o, s, e, p, a, v. In Latin this would be, "Iosep ave", I salute you! He hides it and encrypts it, something like in the Gospels. He hides him behind the mantle of Mary, but he knows he is there and sends a greeting, a greeting hidden and discreet: "Hello Joseph!", we all know that you are there too.

The Divine Comedy is full of little secrets and little treasures hidden in this way ... It is an infinite world into which I entered at eleven years of age and I have not yet come out!

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