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PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS

WOMAN AND MAN
the *humanum* in its entirety

On the 20th anniversary
of John Paul II's Apostolic Letter
Mulieris Dignitatem
(1988-2008)

International Congress
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FOREWORD

In every area of social, economic, cultural and political life, there has been increasing awareness that genuine recognition must be given to the dignity and rights of women. During the second half of the twentieth century, this brought about profound changes in their traditional role and in man-woman relations. This is a positive development, but it has given rise to trends that today take the form of disturbing shifts in the very models of male and female identity.

At the present time there are two main trends that we encounter when dealing with the status of women, and they both derive from radical feminism.¹ The first trend seeks to defend feminine identity by placing it in competition with the male role. It encourages women to strive to achieve empowerment, but it can make them feel antagonistic towards men. The second trend attempts to preclude supremacy of one of the sexes over the other by trying to cancel out all differences. It claims that they are the result of social and cultural conditioning. This is the “gender ideology” according to which physical differences have no significance in the definition of sexual identity. Each one is free to arbitrarily choose and to disregard biological evidence. Our times are subjugated to relativism and have no solid points of reference or shared values. Discretion is left to the contradictory subjectivity of individual choices and truth is being substituted by opinion,² leading to an increasingly diluted and confused male and female identity. These trends threaten and put into question the figures of father and mother,

¹ 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 the World*, no. 2.

² Cf. Z. BAUMAN, *Liquid Modernity*, Oxford 2000.

the institution of heterosexual marriage and two-parent families. They open the doors to an asexual neutered society.

These new cultural paradigms are the result of programmes and strategies that are carefully studied and put into operation extensively at a global level and in a binding way with the complicity of major international agencies, beginning with the United Nations conferences in Cairo (1994) and Peking (1995). Some people even claim that a real “cultural revolution” is taking place that aims to “de-construct” (Jacques Derrida) all that is given – beginning with the human person as man and woman –, in order to “construct” not only a “new world order”, but also a “new human being”, definitely contrary to the anthropology of Judeo-Christian tradition.³ One fact is certain: today there is a battle underway for the human person and for our dignity and call to transcendence, and it is centred on women and the concept of femininity. The greatest challenge today to be taken up by the Church, “expert in humanity” (Paul VI) and “the good samaritan for humankind” (John Paul II), is an anthropological challenge.

Being fully aware of this for a long time, the Pontifical Council for the Laity has been following with particular attention all that has been happening in the vast world of women at the cultural, social and political levels. We have tried to promote in-depth study on the man-woman relationship in their specificity, reciprocity and complementarity, the central point of the anthropological question. This can be seen in the 1996 international congress on the theme: “Renewed commitment of all for the welfare of women all over the world” and the international seminar in 2004 on “Men and women: diversity and mutual complementarity”.⁴ The theme of the present congress: “Woman and man, the

³ Cf. M.A. PEETERS, *The New Global Ethic: Challenges for the Church*, Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics 2006, 1-6.

⁴ Cf. *The Logic of Self-Giving*, International Meeting on “women”, Roma 1996, ed. Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City 1997; also *Men and Women: Diversity and Mutual Complementarity*, ed. Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City 2005.

humanum in its entirety”, the proceedings of which are collected in this publication, insists on the need to base all reflection on solid wholesome anthropological principles if it is to contribute to the genuine advancement of women in society and the Church. The Servant of God John Paul II wrote in this regard: “It is a question of understanding the reason for and the consequences of the Creator’s decision that the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man”.⁵ On another occasion, the Pope developed this thought further: “Womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological. It is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds full realization [...] woman and man are marked neither by a static and undifferentiated equality nor by an irreconcilable and inexorably conflictual difference. Their most natural relationship, which corresponds to the plan of God, is the ‘unity of the two’, a relational ‘uni-duality’, which enables each to experience their interpersonal and reciprocal relationship as a gift which enriches and which confers responsibility”.⁶ This is a truth that is replete with practical and existential consequences for the whole of humanity and for the lives of each man and each woman. It is a truth of which men and women must discover the beauty so that they can make it a life programme to be lived out together day by day.

Our congress was convened to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the first document from the pontifical magisterium to be dedicated entirely to women. It brought new and interesting theological and anthropological horizons into the debate on the status of women in the Church and in society. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, on the occasion of the press conference presenting *Mulieris Dignitatem*, said: “Anyone who goes to the

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 1.

⁶ IDEM, *Letter to Women*, nos. 7 and 8.

trouble of delving further into this document will recognise that beyond its theological depth, it is also a document of great human quality that transmits a message to us and concerns us all”.⁷

Mulieris Dignitatem came into being through John Paul II’s vigorous insistence on the dignity of human beings who “always and only exist as a woman or a man”. It gave the Church reliable guidance and encouragement in times of great challenge and existential and cultural confusion. Now, twenty years later, this document continues to be an invaluable source of inspiration and teaching that we can turn to time and again to read and meditate, beginning with the pages in Genesis where God created the human being in his image, male and female, right up to the “evangelical newness of life” manifested in the person of Jesus, in his words and in the way he behaved towards women.

The origin of this document is also very significant. In a sense it is a result of the 1987 Synod of Bishops on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church and the world.⁸ During the synod debate, a number of bishops expressed the need to hear a clear statement from the ecclesial magisterium on the dignity and vocation of women in the Church and in society. The Pope responded to this concern with *Mulieris Dignitatem*, published on the solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady in 1988. The Servant of God John Paul II attributed great importance to theological anthropology that is based on God’s original plan for the human person “male and female”. “It is only by beginning from these bases, which make it possible to understand the greatness of the dignity and vocation of women, that one is able to speak of their active presence in the Church and in society”.⁹ In his teachings, there-

⁷ J. RATZINGER, “Woman, custodian of the human being”, in: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1 October 1988, 11 (Italian edition).

⁸ Cf. J. SCHOTTE, “A path intertwined with the 1987 Synod”, in: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 1 October 1988, 1 and 11 (Italian edition).

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 1.

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fore, the anthropological challenge inherent in post-modern culture must be a real priority for the commitment and apostolate of the lay faithful, men and women. It is part of their vocation to be consciously and responsibly aware of all the richness contained in their femininity and masculinity – especially as spouses and as mothers and fathers – and to joyfully proclaim to the whole world the beauty of God’s plan, God who is creator and redeemer of each human person.

Today we must strongly denounce the marginalisation of women, and the injustice and abuse they suffer in many social and cultural contexts, as well as the danger lying within new cultural paradigms like that of “gender”. It is necessary for lay Catholics who are involved in politics to be fully consistent with the principles of the Church’s teaching as they work to ensure just laws that respect the dignity and vocation of women.¹⁰ All of this must be accompanied by persuasive witness of men and women who live according to God’s design and are fulfilled in their own identity. It is not by chance that John Paul II invites the lay faithful to be promoters of a “new feminism” that “rejects the temptation of imitating models of ‘male domination’, in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation”.¹¹

Christ continues to remind the women and men of our times: “You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world” (*Mt 5: 13-16*). The “newness of life” that was given to us in Baptism should also touch the way we understand and live out our identity as man or woman in the Church and society. The deep cultural crisis of our times calls on us to give a clear and persuasive Christian response with the style, language and method of the Gospel. We should not allow ourselves to be led by the diktats of worldly models, but unfortunately this

¹⁰ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*.

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 99.

can happen. We think of terms that are now being used within the Church, like ‘empowerment’, words that are typically used by the new global ethics.¹² Today the Lord is asking his disciples to courageously go against the tide of being politically correct, and to be aware that we have something essential to offer the world: the essence of the human person and the two institutions that are crucial for humanity which are marriage and family. 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 [...] In this sense, our times in particular await the manifestation of that ‘genius’ which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human!”¹³

It would be good to recall at this point two statements from the Second Vatican Council that John Paul II quoted in *Mulieris Dignitatem* in response to this anthropological challenge presented by post-modernity. The first one says: “The Church [...] maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever”.¹⁴ The second one is: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light [...] Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear”.¹⁵ The definitive key to “eternal truth about the

¹² Cf. M.A. PEETERS, “The current situation in the debate”, in: *Men and Women: Diversity and Mutual Complementarity*, op. cit., 83-84.

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

¹⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 22.

human being, man and woman”¹⁶ is Christ. Without Christ the human person remains an undecipherable enigma.

Pope Benedict XVI, with his extraordinary ability to catch the essence of every problem, explains: “We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires. We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism”.¹⁷ He pronounced these words several days before his election to the pontificate, during which he has continued to point out that the absence of God in the lives of human beings – this “strange forgetfulness of God” that is characteristic of the postmodern world – is the real root of the evils that afflict humanity. The Pope explained further: “It is a matter of the centrality of God, and not just any god but the God with the Face of Jesus Christ. Today, this is crucial. There are so many problems one could list that must be solved, but none of them can be solved unless God is put at the centre, if God does not become once again visible to the world, if he does not become the determining factor in our lives and also enter the world in a decisive way through us”.¹⁸

These are the directions that guided the work of the international congress on “Woman and man, the *humanum* in its entirety” which was held from 7 to 9 February 2008. It called together two hundred and eighty delegates from 49 countries in five continents, representing thirty-seven bishops’ conferences, twenty-eight ecclesial movements and new communities, sixteen women’s associations and nine religious institutes. The congress was of a high scientific level and did not fail to tackle the burning issues of our times. There were five lectures. The first was given by Cardinal Antonio Cañizares who opened the session

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 2.

¹⁷ J. RATZINGER, Homily at the *Missa pro eligendo Pontifice*, 18 April 2005.

¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Mass with the Swiss bishops, 7 November 2006.

with an assessment of the debate on the status of women twenty years after *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the apostolic letter that according to the Cardinal, primate of Spain, “proclaimed an illuminating truth concerning women, a joyful contribution for the Church and for humanity”. The central issues covered in the other four lectures were the newness brought about by the way in which Jesus of Nazareth related with women, “male and female God created them” (*Gen* 1: 27), uni-dual anthropology, and the responsibility and participation of women in building the Church and society. They were followed by very interesting open discussions. There were panel discussions on the topics of Christianity and the advancement of women, contemporary cultural trends and difficulties, the role and mission of women, and priorities in different parts of the world. On these themes there were contributions that made a strong impact. They spoke of womanhood being reduced to a consumer product, the gender ideology, the rejection of maternity and family, and women who have to deal with fundamentalism and violence.

The postmodern world was judged severely but not acrimoniously. This view was the result of dealing with reality in truth, always mindful that, as Christians, this is the world to which the Master has sent us to proclaim the Gospel. It is God’s “yes” to men and women that is sealed with the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died for us and rose again. In the congress there was a general atmosphere that spoke of a new maturity in approaching the question and of a new period opening up for reflection by men and women. This growth was symbolically expressed by something that was said by one of the participants in the congress: “I am proud to be Catholic and to belong to the Church”. To crown the meeting, we were received by His Holiness Benedict XVI. In his address – which is included in this publication –, the Pope strongly emphasised the Catholic concept of the identity of the human being, of the need for anthropological research that will deal with both female and male identity – as the latter is also the object of partial and ideological studies –, and of the urgent need for Christians

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to be committed to bringing the newness of Christianity into places and cultures where there is still a dominant male mentality that discriminates or undervalues women simply because they are women. Catholics should therefore become actively involved in associations, ecclesial movements and new communities as well as in their parishes, and they should come together to use all the synergy possible with people who share the same ideals. Only in this way will their presence have the necessary force to give life to a new culture that will restore value to the dual unity of men and women based on “ the foundation of the dignity of every person created in the image and likeness of God, who ‘male and female he created them’ (*Gn* 1: 27), [bringing with it] inscribed in body and soul, the relationship with the other, love for the other, interpersonal communion ”. This is a truth that the disciples of Jesus Christ must safeguard with courage, without any sense of inferiority, in a world and in an age in which the very essence of the human person as desired by the Creator is in jeopardy.

Cardinal STANISŁAW RYŁKO
President
Pontifical Council for the Laity

Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI

to the participants at the Congress
received in audience on Saturday, 9 February 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a true pleasure to welcome and greet all of you taking part in the international convention on the theme: “Woman and Man, the *Humanum* in Its Entirety”, organized on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. I greet Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, and I am grateful to him for expressing your common sentiments. I greet the Secretary, Bishop Josef Clemens, and the members and staff of the Dicastery. In particular I greet the women, who are the great majority of those present and who have enriched the Congress work with their experience and competence.

The theme upon which you have been reflecting is highly topical: from the second half of the 20th century up to today the movement for the improvement of women in the various aspects of social life has given rise to countless reflections and debates, and has seen many initiatives multiply which the Catholic Church has often watched with close attention. The man-woman relationship in its respective specificity, reciprocity and complementarity certainly constitutes a central point of the “anthropological question”, so decisive in contemporary culture and ultimately for every culture. Numerous events and Pontifical Documents have touched upon the emerging reality of the feminine question. I limit myself to recalling those of my beloved Predecessor John Paul II, who, in June of 1995, wrote a *Letter to Women*, while on 15 August 1988, 20 years ago this year, he published the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. This text on the vocation and dignity of women, of great

theological, spiritual and cultural richness, in its turn has inspired the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World, of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II wished to deepen the fundamental anthropological truths of man and woman, the equality of their dignity and the unity of both, the well-rooted and profound diversity between the masculine and the feminine and their vocation to reciprocity and complementarity, to collaboration and to communion (cf. no. 6). This “uni-duality” of man and woman is based on the foundation of the dignity of every person created in the image and likeness of God, who “male and female he created them” (*Gn* 1: 27), avoiding an indistinct uniformity and a dull and impoverishing equality as much as an irreconcilable and conflictual difference (cf. John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, no. 8). This dual unity brings with it, inscribed in body and soul, the relationship with the other, love for the other, interpersonal communion that implies “that the creation of man is also marked by a certain likeness to the divine communion” (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7). Therefore, when men and women demand to be autonomous and totally self-sufficient, they run the risk of being closed in a self-reliance that considers ignoring every natural, social or religious bond as an expression of freedom, but which, in fact, reduces them to an oppressive solitude. To promote and sustain the real advancement of women and men one cannot fail to take this reality into account.

A renewed anthropological study is certainly necessary based on the great Christian tradition, which incorporates new scientific advances and, given today’s cultural sensitivity, in this way contributes to deepening not only the feminine identity but also the masculine, which is often the object of partial and ideological reflections. Faced with cultural and political trends that seek to eliminate, or at least cloud and confuse, the sexual differences inscribed in human nature, considering them a cultural construct, it is necessary to recall God’s design that created the

human being masculine and feminine, with a unity and at the same time an original and complementary difference. Human nature and the cultural dimension are integrated in an ample and complex process that constitutes the formation on one's own identity, where both dimensions, that of the feminine and that of the masculine, correspond to and complete each other.

Opening the work of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences in May of last year in Brazil, I was able to recall how a masculine mentality still persists that ignores the novelty of Christianity which recognizes and proclaims that men and women share equal dignity and responsibility. There are places and cultures where women are discriminated against or undervalued for the sole fact of being women, where recourse is made even to religious arguments and family, social and cultural pressure in order to maintain the inequality of the sexes, where acts of violence are consummated in regard to women, making them the object of mistreatment and of exploitation in advertising and in the consumer and entertainment industry. Faced with such grave and persistent phenomena the Christian commitment appears all the more urgent so that everywhere it may promote a culture that recognizes the dignity that belongs to women, in law and in concrete reality.

God entrusts to women and men, according to their respective capacities, a specific vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. Here I am thinking of the family, a community of love open to life, the fundamental cell of society. In it the woman and the man, thanks to the gift of maternity and paternity, together carry out an irreplaceable role in regard to life. Children from their conception have the right to be able to count on their father and mother to take care of them and to accompany their growth. The State, for its part, must uphold with appropriate social policies everything that promotes the stability and unity of matrimony, the dignity and responsibility of couples, their rights and irreplaceable duty as educators of their children. Besides, it is

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necessary to enable the woman to collaborate in the building of society, appreciating her typical “feminine genius”.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you once again for coming. I hope that the Convention’s work may be successful, and I assure you of a remembrance in prayer, invoking the maternal intercession of Mary, that she may help the women of our time to carry out their vocation and their mission in the ecclesial and civil community. With these wishes, I impart to you present here and to those dear to you, a special Apostolic Blessing.

H.H. Benedict XVI

I. LECTURES

Reflection on the subject of women twenty years after the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*: evaluation and prospects

Cardinal ANTONIO CAÑIZARES LLOVERA*

1. INTRODUCTION

On the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady twenty years ago, the apostolic letter of the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* was published. It was the culmination of the Marian Year which, in a way, was a preparation for the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. The theological and pastoral framework of that Marian Year was outlined in two important pontifical documents: John Paul II's sixth encyclical, *Redemptor Mater* (25 March 1987), and his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988).

The celebration of Mary ever Virgin, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, was an occasion not only to emphasise the “Marian principle” of the Church, but also to project light on the great question of womanhood, and at the same time on contemporary feminism. John Paul II sustained in both documents that Mary “sheds light on womanhood as such by the very fact that God, in the sublime event of the Incarnation of his Son, entrusted himself to the free and active ministry of a woman. It can thus be said that women, by looking to Mary, find in her the secret of living their femininity with dignity and of achieving their own true advancement”.¹

* Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 46.

Our Lady is indeed very important for the current debate on the “Woman Question”. John Paul II recognises this in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* when he stated that Marian devotion “is not only a form of piety; it is also an attitude – an attitude toward woman as woman”. He goes on to say: “If our century has been characterized in liberal societies by a growing feminism, it might be said that this trend is a reaction to the lack of respect accorded each woman”. He confesses in the following line: “Everything that I have written on this theme in *Mulieris Dignitatem* I have felt since I was very young, and, in a certain sense, from infancy. Perhaps I was also influenced by the climate of the time in which I was brought up – it was a time of great respect and consideration for women, especially for women who were mothers”.²

This is the framework in which we place the apostolic letter on “the dignity of women” by our fondly-remembered John Paul II: on the one hand, the figure of Mary that illuminates the truth, greatness and dignity of women, and on the other, the truly exquisite respect that this truth, greatness and dignity deserve and demand. “I think that a certain contemporary feminism finds its roots in the absence of true respect for woman. Revealed truth teaches us something different. Respect for woman, amazement at the mystery of womanhood, and finally the nuptial love of God Himself and of Christ, as expressed in the Redemption, are all elements that have never been completely absent in the faith and life of the Church. This can be seen in a rich tradition of customs and practices that, regrettably, is nowadays being eroded”.³

When the Pope wrote this apostolic letter, he was very aware of the situation in which women find themselves in many parts of the world. He was familiar with how the liberal mentality in advanced nations and feminist movements approach the issue in our times. He also knew what kind

² IDEM, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, London 1994, 216-217.

³ *Ibid.*, 217.

of reciprocal relationships usually exist between men and women. He was not indifferent to current women's issues, nor to contemporary feminist movements and so-called women's liberation organisations. It was because he had this wide panorama before him that his "meditation", as he called his apostolic letter, is not an abstract lucubration nor pure theoretical reflection. This is also the reason why he went to the basics, the anthropological foundations on which to build a genuine conception of women, with all the consequences it implies for real respect for the dignity and greatness that is theirs, the same respect that is shown to men. He certainly reflected on this, and it can be seen in so many lectures, speeches, homilies, overseas pastoral visits, and in a special way, in his *Letter to the Women of the World* on the occasion of the international year of women and the Beijing Congress in 1995.⁴

Before going any further, I would like to draw your attention to an aspect that was of primary interest and an essential teaching of John Paul II: his concern for the human person, also linked to the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. In his first encyclical he spoke of how the human person, man and woman, in the truth of each one's existence, "is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself".⁵ Throughout his pontificate, his pastoral concern was that the value and dignity of the human person – man and woman –, a cause of amazement connected to Christ,⁶ should be totally fulfilled according to God's will.⁷ Just like the Church, this Pope of fond memory did not remain insensitive to the dangers that threaten this dignity.⁸ He was one of those who most shared the Church's solicitude for the whole person – man and woman – in his and her unique and unrepeatable human reality "which keeps intact the image and

⁴ Cf. IDEM, *Letter to Women*.

⁵ IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 14.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 10.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 13.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

likeness of God”.⁹ His concern was centred on the person – man and woman – in a special way. This is why the apostolic letter on the dignity of women cannot be separated from this first and principal concern.

The subject of the dignity of women, in which the reality of every person – man and woman – is totally included, is a question that cannot be separated from Jesus Christ, in whom is revealed the full Truth about Jesus, about us, and about our transcendent destiny. Human persons cannot be fulfilled if it is not based on this foundation. “Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of the human person and entered our hearts”.¹⁰ “Christ knows what is in mankind. He alone knows it”.¹¹ The Second Vatican Council tells us: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light [...] Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear”.¹² In the mystery of Christ, in the person of Christ, in the Incarnation and the Redemption, the human person – man and woman – “finds again the greatness, dignity and value that belong to his humanity” and “becomes newly ‘expressed’ and, in a way, is newly created”. Therefore, the human person – man and woman – who wishes to understand him or herself thoroughly “and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of their being – must with their unrest, uncertainty and even their weakness and sinfulness, with their life and death, draw near to Christ”. They must “appropriate and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find themselves”,¹³ whether they are men or women.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

¹¹ IDEM, Homily at the Mass at the beginning of the Pontificate, 22 October 1978.

¹² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 10.

Relationship with Christ the Redeemer, the incarnate Word of God, is not an abstract or generic relationship with humankind. It is with each man and woman. Jesus is the Redeemer of each individual person: “the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every human person”.¹⁴ That is why Jesus Christ is the only way for each person, for the totality of the *humanum*: there is “one single way: it is the way that has stood the test of centuries and it is also the way of the future”.¹⁵ For this reason, when John Paul II was writing on the greatness and dignity of women, he looked to Jesus Christ, and there he found the light that illuminates the truth of women and men in the totality of the *humanum*.

Today, twenty years later, when we reread *Mulieris Dignitatem*, we find that this apostolic letter continues to throw light on a wide range of today’s issues concerning women that are in some ways new, but not set against each other. It deals with key points and follows basic anthropological principles, and it is able to offer an adequate response to these issues.

We all know how the feminist movements have evolved, and the differences between them that are sometimes substantial. Today we see radical feminism, or gender feminism, spreading extremely forcefully yet silently. This kind of feminism arose towards the end of the nineteen sixties during the “sexual revolution” and aimed for equality of the sexes. Behind this feminism there is a hidden ideology that seeks to eliminate the idea that humanity is divided into two sexes. This ideology would like to show that the obvious anatomical differences do not correspond to established nature but that they are the product of the culture of a specific place or era. According to this ideology, the difference between the sexes is something conventional that is attributed by society, and each one can “invent” him/herself. This feminism “is

¹⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 13.

based on an analysis of history as a class struggle between oppressors and the oppressed, viewing monogamous marriage as the first antagonism between men and women. The ‘gender feminists’ call urgently for ‘deconstructing’ the ‘socially constructed roles’ of men and women, because this socialization, in their opinion, affects the woman in a negative and unjust way. That is why the ‘gender feminists’ [...] consider that an essential part of their program is the promotion of ‘free choice’ in matters related to reproduction and life style. ‘Free choice in reproduction’ is, for them, the key expression to refer to procured abortion, while ‘lifestyle’ aims to promote homosexuality, lesbianism and all the other forms of sexuality outside marriage”.¹⁶

This radical feminism is turning into a real revolution: the gender ideology revolution. It is an all-out cultural revolution, one of the most insidious and destructive imaginable. This revolution has many means and instruments at the service of those who promote it and it has alliances with influential powers. This movement has some very powerful and influential lobbies. The promotion of certain laws in individual countries and also in global organisations, is another of these instruments. Some of the powerful media clearly demonstrate their aims.

As I said before, sexuality according to this ideology is not strictly speaking regarded as a constituent element of a human person. It claims that a human being is the result of a free choice. Regardless of physical sex, a man or woman can choose the gender they want. That is, they could decide at any moment – and consequently change their decision whenever they wish – to opt for heterosexuality, homosexuality, lesbianism, transsexualism... No one can fail to notice what all of this implies and the fundamental questions that are contained within it.

Beyond radical feminist ideology, and beyond a new version of the

¹⁶ O. ALZAMORA REVOREDO, “An Ideology of Gender: Dangers and Scope”, in: PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Lexicon of Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions*, Human Life International, 2006, 465.

“class struggle” and Marxism, which in its origin and development motivates this ideology, the social and cultural change this implies is extremely far-reaching. In this cultural revolution there is denial of the concept of nature and the very truth of the human person. There is just unlimited freedom. There are no constituent elements, nothing that precedes us, that is given to us and that we cannot have at our disposal. Everything is freedom. There is no valid moral order in itself and for itself. Everything depends on what is decided. There is no room for one universal moral order. The only order to be established is the order that gives freedom to everyone. It would be freedom that makes us real, and not truth that makes us free. The nexus of the individual-family-society is lost in this revolution, and a person becomes simply an individual. There is no truth, no nature, no creation. There is only culture. In this distinction between sex and gender, or between nature and culture, the personal dimension of the human being is reduced to individuality. It does not count and is therefore destroyed. Gender theory, or rather the ideology that gives rise to a distorted global vision of reality, calls into question the family and its truth – marriage between a man and a woman that is open to life. Consequently, it debases the whole of society (in fact, the family disappears, which is perhaps the real aim).

This ideology also implies rejection of all that comes with “tradition” and identity. Moreover, this revolution, by excluding outright any reference to the transcendent dimension of human beings and of society, by excluding God, creator of humankind who loves each one of us for ourselves, brings with it a secular dimension of life in which there is no place for God or any objective truth. Radical relativism is another element that supports it, and the inevitable consequence of that is compromise with falsehood.

Therefore we find ourselves facing all-out subversion, a real cultural revolution with hugely destructive consequences for the future of humanity and society. In this kind of situation we must present the power of truth. We can find ideas and answers to this ideology in the

apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* and in other Church teachings, largely in some of the later writings of the Magisterium. As well as the already cited *Letter to Women* (1995) by John Paul II, there is the *Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and the world* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated 31 May 2004. Other helpful documents include the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1982), the *Letter to Families* (1994), and the catecheses on the *Theology of the Body* (1979-1984) by John Paul II; *Educational Guidance in Human Love: outlines for sex education* (1983) by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education; the document from the Pontifical Council for the Family on *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family* (1995); Benedict XVI's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2006). We must not forget to mention some basic texts like the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as its *Compendium*, and also the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. These documents do not take an argumentative position. They proclaim the luminous truth about womanhood according to Revelation, and moreover, according to upright human reasoning that explores the truth. All of these documents are a joyful, beautiful and positive offering to the Church and to all of humanity.

2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES IN *MULIERIS DIGNITATEM*. BACK TO THE “BEGINNING”, TO THE CREATION

According to John Paul II, in order to construct a theology in keeping with the dignity of women and the current search for equality we must go back to the “beginning” and the mystery of humanity embodied as male and female.¹⁷ To have been created male and female in the

¹⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 1.

image and likeness of God is our “fundamental inheritance” transmitted throughout history. That we have been redeemed by Christ as man and woman is the message of the Church.¹⁸

2.1. “*Male and female he created them*”. *Dignity. Person. Equality*

The Magisterium of the Church directs us to the “beginning” spoken of by Jesus – the moment of the origin of creation – according to which revealed truth on the human being as “the image and likeness of God”, the Creator, is the unchanging basis of Christian anthropology: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*Gen 1: 27*).¹⁹ This short verse from the book of Genesis contains fundamental anthropological truths: the human person – male and female – was created. They did not make themselves. It was God through his Word who made them. Humanity is the highest of all that is created in the visible world, the culmination of creation that God saw and said that it was good. The human person – man and woman – was very good. The origin of humanity is in the call to existence of man and woman, and this crowns the whole work of creation. They are both equally human beings, the man as much as the woman. The human being, the highest of all creatures, is differentiated and created man and woman – equally differentiated in man and woman. Both were created in the image of God, and by their very nature they unite the spiritual and material world. God established bonds of friendship with them and assigned to them a unique role within creation.²⁰

The human person – whether man or woman – is equally a person. Both were created in the image and likeness of a personal God. That

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 2.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 6.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*; see also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 289 and 355.

which makes the human person similar to God – unlike the world of living beings that includes those with consciousness, animals – is the fact that humans are rational beings that are created for communion. It is because of this quality that men and women “have dominion” over the other creatures in the visible world²¹ and can enter into a relationship of communion. It is precisely because of being created in God’s image that the human being – man and woman – has the dignity of being a person, and this is common to both. This is not just some thing, but someone capable of self-knowledge, self-possession and voluntary self-giving and who enters into communion with other people. Through grace, they are called to a covenant with their Creator “to offer God a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in their stead”.²²

2.2. “Flesh of his flesh”. Unity of man and woman

John Paul II said about the second description in Genesis (2: 18-25): “the woman is created by God ‘from the rib’ of the man and is placed at his side as another ‘I’, as the companion of the man, who is alone in the surrounding world of living creatures and who finds in none of them a ‘helper’ suitable for himself. Called into existence in this way, the woman is immediately recognized by the man as ‘flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones’ (cf. *Gen 2: 23*) and for this very reason she is called ‘woman’. In biblical language this name indicates her essential identity with regard to man – ‘is-’*issab* – something which unfortunately modern languages in general are unable to express. ‘She shall be called woman (*’issab*) because she was taken out of man (*’is*)’ (*Gen 2: 23*). The biblical text provides sufficient bases for recognizing the essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity.

²¹ Cf. *Gen 1: 28*; see also JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 357.

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. From the very beginning they appear as a ‘unity of the two’, and this signifies that the original solitude is overcome, the solitude in which man does not find ‘a helper fit for him’ (*Gen 2: 20*). [...] Certainly it is a matter of a life’s companion, with whom, as a wife, the man can unite himself, becoming with her ‘one flesh’ and for this reason leaving ‘his father and his mother’ (cf. *Gen 2: 24*). Thus in the same context as the creation of man and woman, the biblical account speaks of God’s instituting marriage as an indispensable condition for the transmission of life to new generations, the transmission of life to which marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordered: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’ (*Gen 1: 28*)”.²³

Man cannot live alone. The human being can only exist as a unity of the two and, consequently, in relationship with another human person. It is a reciprocal relationship of man with woman and woman with man. To be a person in the image of God also means to exist in relationship with another “I”. Man and woman are both loved by God, both in their perfect equality as human persons and in their essence respectively as man and woman. “To be man” and “to be woman” is what God wanted, in their equality and in their difference. They each have a common differentiated dignity.²⁴

2.3. *Communion. Love*

In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the Pope goes a step further and adds that “God, who allows himself to be known by human beings through Christ, is the unity of the Trinity: unity in communion. In this way new light is also thrown on man’s image and likeness to God [...] The fact

²³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

²⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 369 and 370.

that man ‘created as man and woman’ is the image of God [...] means that man and woman, created as a ‘unity of the two’ in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God”.²⁵ As persons in the image of the God of Love, they are created to live in communion. In the creation of humanity there is a certain similarity with divine communion and its foundation in love. This similarity is a quality of the essence of being a person of both man and woman, and at the same time it is a call and a duty. From the beginning they are called to love, the foundation of the whole human ethos. “In the ‘unity of the two’, man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist ‘side by side’, or ‘together’, but they are also called to exist mutually ‘one for the other’. [...] To say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist ‘for’ others, to become a gift. This applies to every human being, whether woman or man, who live it out in accordance with the special qualities proper to each”.²⁶ Humanity means called to interpersonal communion. “Man and woman were made ‘for each other’ – not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be ‘helpmate’ to the other, for they are equal as persons (‘bone of my bones...’) and complementary as masculine and feminine. In marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming ‘one flesh’, they can transmit human life: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’. By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents co-operate in a unique way in the Creator’s work”.²⁷

All of this illuminates “from the beginning” the truth about the human being – man and woman – and about marriage, a community of

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 372.

persons in love. “The divine ‘We’ is the eternal pattern of the human ‘we’, especially of that ‘we’ formed by the man and the woman created in the divine image and likeness”.²⁸ The truth of the human being – man and woman –, the essence and commitment of marriage and of the family are ultimately defined by love. This is why the family receives the mission to live, care for, reveal and communicate love as a living mirror of God who is love, and who is communion in people’s love. This is the basic principle of every human person and family. This is where, ultimately, we find the root and source of all of human ethos.

If, as we have said, and following the magisterium of the Church expressed by John Paul II, the most perfect key of the whole Christian anthropology on which all morality rests is based on the fact that the human being was created in the image and likeness of God, and that each human being, moreover, is loved and affirmed by God in a unique and personal way. The human person “is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself”.²⁹ From the fact of being in the “image and likeness of God” springs the root of human dignity and the respect which this deserves. Made in the image of the Creator, human beings stand before the Lord as specific persons called by God so that they may know Him and love Him. Thus each person, each man and woman, is something sacred, undeniable, unforgettable, unique, worthy of love and respect, exclusively for themselves and in themselves.

Furthermore, the human being resembles God primarily because “the Creator modelled them on his Son Jesus Christ who is the true and original image of God, and for whom God the Father created all things [...]. Jesus Christ is, in fact, the heart and centre, the beginning and end of the loving design of God for humanity and creation”.³⁰ God

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, no. 6.

²⁹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24.

³⁰ CONFERENCIA EPISCOPAL ESPAÑOLA, *Esta es nuestra fe!*, Madrid 1986, 120-121.

shows himself to us as real and as saviour in the person of Christ. His glory is mirrored for us in the face of Christ. God does not exist without Christ, that is, without the human person. Therefore, the human person cannot be understood without this highest fulfilment of his or her possibilities and needs which is accomplished in Christ. Jesus Christ instituted a new way to fulfil human life. It is characterised by self-surrender and openness to the Other and to others, by the absolute affirmation of oneself through renouncing a closed egoistic self-affirmation, and by unconditional self-giving. Life is achieved, not by keeping it, but by giving it. Jesus lived his whole life as pro-existence, as gift for others and for the sake of others.

Christianity begins at the point where I affirm the human being as a person, as a human being, as one who is loved by God for himself or herself, deserving of all love, as a neighbour and as a brother or sister. In Christ we have discovered that we are close to God, loved by God, and that we are God's children, affirmed absolutely until the solidarity of death. We already know the meaning, demands, possibilities and truth of the relationship between man and woman, between married couples, between parents and children and children among themselves, because we know what God, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, has done for humankind. It is in this life, death and resurrection of Jesus that we have the measure of what it means in real love. This reference to God and Christ in their specific destiny establishes a relationship between family members: husband-wife, parents-children, brother-sister, that joins them all in a sacred sphere where the determining factor is not domination or dependence, superiority or inferiority, legitimacy or priority. It is insertion in a shared divine life, in God's love, that makes us all members of a pre-existing family. It does not eliminate differences but it does relativize them by situating them in the light of their origin.

That origin is no other than the love of God, as Pope John Paul II said so beautifully and profoundly in his *Letter to Families*: "Man's

coming into being does not conform to the laws of biology alone, but also, and directly, to God's creative will, which is concerned with the genealogy of the sons and daughters of human families. God 'willed' man from the very beginning, and God 'wills' him in every act of conception and every human birth. God 'wills' man as a being similar to himself, as a person. This man, every man, is created by God 'for his own sake'. That is true of all persons, including those born with sicknesses or disabilities. Inscribed in the personal constitution of every human being is the will of God, who wills that man should be, in a certain sense, an end unto himself. God hands man over to himself, entrusting him both to his family and to society as their responsibility. Parents, in contemplating a new human being, are, or ought to be, fully aware of the fact that God 'wills' this individual 'for his own sake'. [...] In God's plan, however, the vocation of the human person extends beyond the boundaries of time. It encounters the will of the Father revealed in the Incarnate Word: God's will is to lavish upon man a sharing in his own divine life. As Christ says: 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly' (*Jn* 10: 10). [...] The content of this self-fulfilment is the fullness of life in God, proclaimed by Christ (cf. *Jn* 6: 37-40), who redeemed us precisely so that we might come to share it".³¹

Therefore, marriage and the family, established on the foundations of a man and a woman joined in wedlock, is the sphere of personal fulfilment, and of personal fulfilment in love, its supreme expression. Pope John Paul II continues: "It is for themselves that married couples want children; in children they see the crowning of their own love for each other. They want children for the family, as a priceless gift. [...] Nonetheless, in conjugal love and in paternal and maternal love we should find inscribed the same truth about man which the Council expressed in a clear and concise way in its statement that God 'willed man for his own

³¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, no. 9.

sake'. It is thus necessary that the will of the parents should be in harmony with the will of God. They must want the new human creature in the same way as the Creator wants him: 'for himself'. Our human will is always and inevitably subject to the law of time and change. The divine will, on the other hand, is eternal. [...] The genealogy of the person is thus united with the eternity of God, and only then with human fatherhood and motherhood, which are realized in time. At the moment of conception itself, man is already destined to eternity in God".³²

It is obvious to all what this implies for the matrimonial alliance of marriage between a man and a woman that is founded on and enlivened by love. "It is a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons. The inner principle of that task, its permanent power and its final goal is love: without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons".³³

"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed 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".³⁴

This revelation of love in the history of humankind has a name and a form: Jesus Christ, Redeemer of humanity, who fully revealed humanity to humanity. Love is the soul of the family: the love of Christ the Redeemer present in marriage, in the family, lived out visibly in family relations. Christ's love that serves and is seen in the family, "the love between husband and wife and hence, in a broader way, the love between members of the same family – between parents and children,

³² *Ibid.*

³³ IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 18.

³⁴ IDEM, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 10.

brothers and sisters and relatives and members of the household – is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family”.³⁵ The family is, above all, “a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion. [...] Only persons are capable of living ‘in communion’. The family originates in a marital communion described by the Second Vatican Council as a ‘covenant’, in which man and woman ‘give themselves to each other and accept each other’”.³⁶ This is God’s plan from the beginning, the prescriptive contents of a reality that has existed since “the beginning”: “so they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (*Mt* 19: 6).

The family, established on the matrimonial union or alliance of a man and a woman, is the sphere that personal life needs. It is here that the relationship and communion among persons is fulfilled in the highest form. It is the sphere in which love achieves its maximum consistency and where the relationship between the I and the you reaches out to another personal life. In the family there is, or there should be, true interpersonal exchange, the basis of personal and social development in which each one gives and receives. “The family, as a community of persons, is thus the first human ‘society’. It arises whenever there comes into being the conjugal covenant of marriage, which opens the spouses to a lasting communion of love and of life, and it is brought to completion in a full and specific way with the procreation of children: the ‘communion’ of the spouses gives rise to the ‘community’ of the family. The ‘community’ of the family is completely pervaded by the very essence of ‘communion’”,³⁷ that is to say, real love between persons.

³⁵ IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 18.

³⁶ IDEM, *Letter to Families*, no. 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

This is why the family is, or should be, the centre and place of encounter of personal existence and of society. It is there that we find the most profound and essential activity in which freedom and initiative emerge, either trust or suspicion in the face of reality, an introduction to the world that can be joyful or else angry and hopeless. The faith that establishes a Christian family gives meaning and consistence to it in every way. The revelation of Jesus shows that the relationship between people is a relationship of proximity. This relationship is established through recognition of the other for himself or herself and not as a fulfilment of one's own self where the other is considered to be a mere helper, a complement or appendix for my use, benefit or pleasure. God, the Creator and Redeemer, in Christ, loves every person for themselves. Therefore the you is not an extension or a supplement of the I. It is an unconditional presence. Each face is an absolute presence and a revelation of the Absolute, of God who loves each human being for himself or herself. A denial of the you is a denial of God, and the denial of God ends up by denying the you or detracting the ultimate reason for acknowledging the you.

The reduction of love to sex and forgetting the other profound dimensions that it presupposes and brings with it, is one of the causes of family crises. It is only when spouses, in their union, commitment and fidelity, always look to the person, that they are able to assume dimensions and circumstances, difficulties and hopes of a different level. True happiness requires absolute trust, unbroken fidelity every day of their lives and commitment to the person, and from these are born a joy that goes far beyond and above pleasure. It is existence lived together in solidarity, or rather in unconditional love, made deeper through Love (with a capital letter), that has been filled by the Spirit. It is this existence that stabilises the family, gives it consistency and helps it resist in times of difficulty. Without absolute fidelity there is no solid affective base, there is no basic trust, and there is no lasting joy. A family established on faithful concern for the other, on communion of love

between people, is the embodiment of affection. It makes it possible to be joyfully involved in the world. The children find a solid base there and they perceive that living is a joyful opportunity and a grace. It is not a hazardous or uncertain destiny. We cannot remove all risk nor substitute the children's freedom, but we can certainly make their freedom possible. Freedom is only possible if there is love and fidelity. Consequently, we can only educate children for freedom and help them to mature in the different aspects of their lives in an atmosphere of faithful love, of stable commitment and of mutual affection.

To close this point, I want to insist on something Pope John Paul II wrote in the *Letter to Families*. "Only 'persons' [...] are able to live 'in communion' on the basis of a mutual choice which is, or ought to be, fully conscious and free".³⁸ This mutual choice is understood as "the full truth of the person" that implies "a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's children in truth and charity".³⁹ This affirmation "first of all confirms what is central to the identity of every man and every woman. This identity consists in the capacity to live in truth and love; even more, it consists in the need of truth and love as an essential dimension of the life of the person. Man's need for truth and love opens him both to God and to creatures: it opens him to other people, to life 'in communion', and in particular to marriage and to the family. In the words of the Council, the 'communion' of persons is drawn in a certain sense from the mystery of the Trinitarian 'We', and therefore 'conjugal communion' also refers to this mystery. The family, which originates in the love of man and woman, ultimately derives from the mystery of God. This conforms to the innermost being of man and woman, to their innate and authentic dignity as persons. [...] This capacity, characteristic of the human being as a per-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

³⁹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24.

son, has at the same time both a spiritual and a bodily dimension. It is also through the body that man and woman are predisposed to form a 'communion of persons' in marriage. When they are united by the conjugal covenant in such a way as to become 'one flesh' (*Gen 2: 24*), their union ought to take place 'in truth and love', and thus express the maturity proper to persons created in the image and likeness of God. [...] The family draws its proper character as a community, its traits of 'communion', from that fundamental communion of the spouses which is prolonged in their children. [...] Their unity, however, rather than closing them up in themselves, opens them towards a new life, towards a new person".⁴⁰

2.4. *Sin disfigures the truth of man and woman and their mutual relationship*

Christian revelation, we are reminded by John Paul II, is profoundly realistic. That is why it does not forget that sin exists and that it entered human history in the beginning and caused the truth of man and woman to be blurred, as well as the relationship between them. Sin is the denial of what God as Creator represents in relation to humankind, and of what God has wanted from the beginning and for ever with regard to humankind. "The biblical description in the Book of Genesis outlines the truth about the consequences of man's sin, as it is shown by the disturbance of that original relationship between man and woman which corresponds to their individual dignity as persons. [...] Therefore when we read in the biblical description the words addressed to the woman: 'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you' (*Gen 3: 16*), we discover a break and a constant threat precisely in regard to this 'unity of the two' which corresponds to the dignity of the image and likeness of God in both of them. [...]

⁴⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, no. 8.

Domination takes the place of 'being a sincere gift' and therefore living 'for' the other: 'he shall rule over you'. This 'domination' indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the 'unity of the two': and this is especially to the disadvantage of the woman, whereas only the equality resulting from their dignity as persons can give to their mutual relationship the character of an authentic '*communio personarum*'. [...] The woman cannot become the 'object' of 'domination' and male 'possession'. [...] These words of Genesis refer directly to marriage, but indirectly they concern the different spheres of social life: the situations in which the woman remains disadvantaged or discriminated against by the fact of being a woman. The revealed truth concerning the creation of the human being as male and female constitutes the principal argument against all the objectively injurious and unjust situations which contain and express the inheritance of the sin which all human beings bear within themselves. The books of Sacred Scripture confirm in various places the actual existence of such situations and at the same time proclaim the need for conversion, that is to say, for purification from evil and liberation from sin: from what offends neighbour, what 'diminishes' man, not only the one who is offended but also the one who causes the offence. This is the unchangeable message of the Word revealed by God".⁴¹

Distorted relations between men and women, including the relationship of domination where women are denied the same dignity as men, is a problem being address by some of the current feminist movements. John Paul II fully shares the diagnosis that something is not right, but he insists that the root of this domination is not culture (although it transmits it), but sin. Sin fractures the community of persons that God wanted "from the beginning", and that is the

⁴¹ IDEM, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 10.

basis of the radical equality of men and women who are in the image of God. Actions that can free women from these standards of domination can never “go against” but be “in favour”. They should be a liberation that protects the characteristic vocation of men and women, which comes from what John Paul II calls their “personal originality” and their destiny. The Pope said: “In the name of liberation from male ‘domination’, women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’”.⁴² Liberation contributes to the re-establishment of the community, of free and fair commitment: the original unity of man and woman desired by God. Unity and equality in diversity, not domination and androgyny. This was inscribed in the nature of human beings “from the beginning”.

However, this situation can be remedied. Where sin abounded, grace was plentiful. This is where God promised and guaranteed salvation that would come with the intervention of a Woman, Mary.

2.5. *The plan of salvation*

The message of revelation contains a basic truth that responds to God’s plans: “a woman is to be found at the centre of this salvific event”, which is God’s revelation of himself to the world. Mary’s “yes” raised a human person, a woman, to “a union with God that exceeds all the expectations of the human spirit”. Thus, Mary’s place “within Christ’s messianic service” confirms that the essence of human dignity is radical commitment, and not in the affirmation of the self or in aspirations for autonomy.

John Paul II’s reflection on Jesus and women⁴³ is one of the loveliest chapters in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which is a letter of great

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 12-16.

beauty and hope. As John Paul II studied the way Christ related with women, he emphasised how this was counter-cultural. He was fond of the story about the woman caught in adultery and renounced by all the male judges who were prepared to stone her to death until Jesus intervened (cf. *Jn* 8: 3-11). The Pope pointed out how the story shows us the contemporary scene at the time. When Christ said that the man without sin should throw the first stone, “Jesus seems to say to the accusers: Is not this woman, for all her sin, above all a confirmation of your own transgressions, of your ‘male’ injustice, your misdeeds?”⁴⁴

John Paul II emphasises that the Christian Gospel is “a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women”. The truth that Christ taught, the truth of love as commitment, was a liberating truth for the women he met on his path. This is one of the reasons why they were faithful to his ministry from the beginning till the end, and they were with him on Calvary when almost all of his disciples had run away. Their fidelity confirms the fact that men and women are totally the same in their ability to receive the outpouring of divine truth and love in the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

John Paul II covered many more topics directly in the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and he also added commentaries and advice on other subjects. The Letter is certainly still valid and topical today, and perhaps it is even more illuminating in our present times. In any case, its ideas have been taken up in many documents and declarations in the subsequent magisterium of the Church. Examples are the *Catechism of*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 14.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 14-16.

Card. Antonio Cañizares Llovera

the Catholic Church and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. It would be difficult to find any other document in the contemporary world that shows greater recognition of the truth, dignity and greatness of women, or that makes a greater defence of women. I hope that this Congress will help us to continue to delve deeper into the Letter's contents in order to give women all that we owe them in justice: and we owe them everything.

Jesus of Nazareth, Mary and the women in the Gospel and in the Early Church

HANNA-BARBARA GERL-FALKOVITZ*

1. PROLEGOMENA: ANTHROPOLOGY BEFORE CHRIST

1.1. *Fundamental principles of the anthropology of antiquity*

Judaism and Christianity contain several anthropological structures that are typical of an earlier era in the Near East and Europe. Women were mostly considered for their role in motherhood and as erotic objects, thereby associating fertility with beauty and attraction. We could say that women represented the “inner” side of life, and even life itself. In this sense, womanhood is powerful, but this is not the personal power of any individual. It is that of being a bearer of life, a representation of Mother Nature in the ambivalent aspect of giving birth to human beings and bringing them the full circle back to death. By contrast, man was defined by his role in filling “outside” needs, especially in the patriarchal obligations of “fatherhood” – symbolically, though not effectively – on the basis of four functions:¹ as a subject of rights (while woman is an object of rights), as “owner” of his family or group (including the land, animals, women, children, etc.), as religious mediator with the gods, and as thinker devoted to study of the spirit,

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¹ Not every man in a patriarchal society is a “patriarch”. This is reserved for heads of a group or family. There are many oppressed men too in these systems. Their ranking depends on their relationship with the leader.

mind, arts and sciences (philosophy and technical and logical thinking were almost exclusively developed by men). Wherever a theory of anthropology was developed, as for example in ancient Greece, it referred to man as being the free, mentally skilful and inventive being.

To summarise: in old mythology as well as in history, the two sexes are very different in their functions. In several languages there is no common term for man and woman as human beings (*Mensch* in German). Moreover, *les droits de l'homme* are primarily the “rights of men”.² The Judaeo-Christian concept would change this tradition, transforming it into the personalisation of the sexes, which means the humanisation of the sexes in whom God is present in a unique way.

1.2. *Essential memories: women in the Old Testament*

The inception of humanity, both male and female, is found in the Book of Genesis (1: 26ff). Both sexes are gifted with the same gift, and both are commanded to be in the image and likeness of the Creator. Israel even regarded it as blasphemous and idolatrous to correlate God with one sex in particular or with the sexual act in its sexual *ekstasis* – for many archaic religions identified the sexual *ekstasis* with the divine itself. Baal, the “lord”, who made “mother earth” fertile with the rains of spring through a sacred wedding ceremony, the *hierogomos*, is an idol. So too is Astarte, the goddess with many names, or the goddesses of fertility against whom the prophets cried out “woe”. The Book of Genesis, in contrast to these myths, explains that both sexes contain far more than simply the quality of sexuality, because they possess an original divine quality. With this conviction, Judaism set itself apart from the surrounding religions of Canaan, Mesopotamia and Egypt.

² Already during the French Revolution Olympe de Gouges attacked this male connotation, including the motto “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*”.

Of course, the main social role of Jewish women was motherhood. For most of the women in the Old Testament the desire for children was the norm, and the need for numerous offspring to support the life of the tribe. However, there is one surprising detail: in the history of God's choice of the people of Israel, some of the important women are infertile. Then they conceive a child unexpectedly, *contra naturam*, following a promise by God. We think of Sarah, Rachel and Hannah, and Elizabeth at the beginning of the New Testament. In this way, motherhood is changed: from a mysterious and magical process which woman herself had to fulfil with prayers and even to manipulate with magical practices, motherhood became an act of God. It was now an act of faith (and not an act of nature). The child is no longer the mother's "property", but is given to her (*nicht Habe, sondern Gabe*). It is a child of promise who belongs to God and is therefore free (from the intentions and aims of the group or parents). This is also true for Hagar, Sarah's slave-girl whom Sarah mistreated because of jealousy. God twice saved both her and her son Ismael from death, because they too were bearers of God's promise. In the case of Ruth the Moabite, God's choice falls on a pagan foreigner. Against all hope, she acquires a husband and child and acknowledges God as the one and only God. Ruth enters into the genealogy of David, and hence of the Messiah himself. This is one of those incredible stories that take place against all probability, against the biological and cultural conditions, and even in spite of her religious origins. In this sense motherhood is considered to be far more than a biological or natural event. It is a blessing from the living God to old or infertile women and to those God chooses. Motherhood has become a personal event and children are signs of God's grace. The children of promise are those who are unexpected, who come to mothers late in life, who are *contra naturam*.

In Deborah the judge, as in Judith, Esther and the prophetesses Miriam and Hulda – apart from the question of their historical or merely symbolic significance – we can recognise traits of politically and

socially active women, traits that go beyond motherhood. Therefore, women in Judaism already had a more spiritual role. There were female judges, political leaders, prophets, mothers of the expected ones, all filled with and directed by divine inspiration. They were capable of acting in faith in difficult situations. Moreover, there was no prostitution in the temple. In the “sacred” prostitution typical of the rites of the fertility goddesses, (still existing in a certain Hindu sect), woman was identified with the goddess who is a sexual symbol, and not as an individual person. Women were treated in an impersonal way and used only as an exemplification of their sex.

To summarise: Genesis 1: 26ff marks a huge step forward towards a new understanding of woman and man by recognising the same divine origin in both. As Edith Stein said, it is not only a gift, but it is also a command to bear God’s image and likeness. God is not present in the idols in the temples, but in the faces of men and women. That is the fundamental reason for the prohibition against making images of God. This revolution did not produce an anthropomorphic theology, but a theomorphic anthropology.³ Men and women are the closest images to God, and not those distant idols seen in temples where the images of clay gods are resplendent in layers of gold.

2. NEW FREEDOMS

Jesus and the women of the New Testament

At the time of Jesus’ birth, Israel was a Roman province. That meant that it was ruled according to the Jewish and Roman patriarchal

³ Feuerbach’s suspicion – in certain aspects correct – that God is only a projection of human anthropomorphic images, should be inverted: Humans are in God’s image and not vice versa.

law, and according to innumerable religious laws which in part marked the distinction between the sexes. Examples include the laws of purification of women, their admittance to the rites, their subordination to men, etc. If we read the four gospels as simple historical documents, we can see that Jesus lived and taught in a way that ignored common usage, and even contradicted it. Nevertheless, we must point out that to describe Jesus as a friend exclusively to women is an example of modern intellectual seduction. Women are not treated as the only receivers of the Gospel. Jesus addresses his words to the “ears that hear”, and those ears can belong to anyone, independent of sex, class, education or origin. In contrast, we note in the teachings of rebirth in Asiatic religions that womanhood has low level status in reincarnation. Women have to be reborn as men before they can achieve their final exit from earthly life. Even Buddha did not want to include women in his group at first. In patriarchal religions, women have no right to approach the divine power. This is usually mediated by men (husband, father, son).

The Gospel strikes a different tone. Women are addressed, not on the basis of their sex, but as individual persons. If we look at the works of Jesus Christ with the eyes of a historian (not yet with the eyes of faith), we can see seven situations in which the laws typical of those times are disregarded or even violated.

1. The call to *metanoia* is valid for both sexes. The kingdom of God is close to both, without distinction. Right from the beginning of Jesus's public life of preaching, he is accompanied and surrounded by women and men (see *Lk* 8), and this was most unusual for women.

2. Religious taboos like the monthly “impurity” of women, are no longer an obstacle. For example, we see in the account of the curing of the haemorrhaging woman, she was not reproached for touching Jesus or accused of making him “impure”.

3. Specific sins are no longer associated with one or other of the sexes. Sexual sins in particular are no longer correlated with women. In

the account of the adulterous woman, Jesus compels the men to consider their own sins (*Jn* 8). In the meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, Jesus addresses the issue of her "thirst" rather than that of her sins (*Jn* 4). We are being told that the sins of the flesh are of less weight than the hidden sins of a wicked heart and of far less weight than those against the Holy Spirit.

4. The conventional idea of power, especially power that is conceived of as male authority or even violence, is pulled down. At the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples as a servant would do, and he did so before he conferred power on them. Authority is service, and this overturns the previous order of "high" and "low". The highest title given to Peter and his successors is *servus servorum Dei*. Hierarchy must be understood as a gift to others, and even as total service to the People of God.

5. For a certain period of time, all possessions are left behind: family, home, fishing, burying one's father, and everything that could stand in the way of the coming of the Kingdom of God. All will be restored a hundredfold according to Jesus' promise. Consequently, traditional bonds are interrupted, and this also applies to women. Jesus was accompanied by women who were married, like Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza (*Lk* 8), who left her family and took her possessions with her.

6. During the three years of Jesus' public life, the normal tasks and duties of the women-disciples are suspended. Their families, children and family obligations go into second place. This led to two new forms of women's status being developed in the Early Church: on the one hand, virgins and widows, and on the other, married women who were no longer to be regarded as their husband's "property". Saint Paul would say that a husband and wife "possess each other". As regards men, their Christian education brought about the presence of celibate men ("for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven") and a style of life in

imitatio Christi according to the three evangelical councils of poverty, chastity and obedience. These are equally valid for both sexes. In the monastic orders, men and women were equal and without distinction in following Christ.

7. Finally, in the Gospels, especially John and Mark, the quality of women as witnesses was strongly emphasised, in spite of the fact that it is clearly stated in the book of *Leviticus* that a woman's testimony is of less validity. However, it was women who were the main witnesses of the death and burial of Jesus, and they alone were the first witnesses of the resurrection. In particular, Mary Magdalene, the "proto-apostle" or "proto-witness", stands out. Martha of Bethany made the first act of faith in "the Messiah, the Son of God" even before Peter. Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman contains theological jewels that had not been said by Jesus before then concerning adoration in the spirit and salvation coming from the Jews. It is John in his gospel who emphasises the words and actions of the women, and he throws further light on the innovation brought about by Jesus in his feminine metaphors concerning rebirth in water and spirit. It is John who shows us that the mother of Jesus was a person who takes initiative when, during the wedding feast of Cana, she encourages Jesus to perform a miracle. It is John who presents her as his own mother and hence the mother of the Church, in accordance with the words of Christ on the cross. In the gospel of Luke, Mary is a child of the Old Testament in the Magnificat (*Lk 2*), a text that follows the canticle of Hanna after she conceived Samuel. (The conception of Jesus is also *contra naturum* and a sequel to the Old Testament). It is Mary who shares the difficult path being followed by her Son, and she is together with the apostles as they pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is in Mary that there is a clear link between woman and spirit, mother and spirit, and virgin and spirit.

3. GRACE AND FREEDOM: MARY

When we consider Mary, we must always remember that references to her in the Gospel are very limited, but that they open up ample possibilities for reflection. The Gospels place emphasis on two elements that lead to a new way of being a woman.

The story of Mary's motherhood is the story of a choice made by the one God. This story immediately touches on the affirmation of Revelation: that we are called in person by the personal God. This implies clear awareness and profound joy, unlike in Greek mythology where the divinities violate women who are unaware of what is happening. Examples are the golden shower that fell upon Danae, and the swan that played with Leda. These and other stories show that all of nature is considered to be a source of sexual stimulation and fecundation. Throughout Greek mythology there is blind and amoral sexuality in an obligatory and unfree process – like the shower – guided by impersonal affective drives that bring about radical change in those involved. Zeus is the symbol of unbridled virility. In mythology, all of these processes take place within the cycle of nature, in the cyclical fertility of the seasons. These stories show the union of the male and female simply in an exclusively biological way. The father and mother, and even the children can be exchanged. They are only part of a divine plan of anonymous multiplication. This kind of natural proliferation is a characteristic of Baal, as it was called by the ancient Israelites. It was fecundity without a purpose, and its fruit was destined to die. Over the centuries, the chosen people learned, through frequent admonishments by the prophets, to distinguish God from the numerous divinities that were similar to Baal, and to distinguish between God and sexuality and violence.

In comparison, the biblical story of the annunciation in Luke seems more discreet and shows full awareness. It does not speak of deception nor of nature, but of a woman being asked for her acceptance, and not directly but through a messenger, an *angelos*. This kind of mediation is

a principle of Revelation. God's sovereignty is not violently imposed and it is not oppressive. On the contrary, the epiphany of the one God is chaste – ears hear but do not hear, eyes see and do not see: in the burning bush in the desert, in the person of Jesus himself, in the paradoxical guise of a servant, apparently the son of a carpenter. God does not violate his creation. God is ever present, not in a destructive way, unlike in the cases of magical union and pantheistic monism. God is present in “hidden presence” (Augustine). In the annunciation to Mary, the Sovereign's will is to ask and to depend on her answer. In Mary is condensed all that human freedom entails. She can respond, and she is not deceived. She can make a real and proper decision on what was proposed to her. Only a free person does not refuse to become a servant. Only a noble mind is prepared to obey willingly. All other explanations are unworthy. The angel's question, and Mary's two questions that followed, are very far from mechanical recitation.

We must admit that the description of this scene comes from an external view. Whatever happens in the soul, as in all true decisions, is hidden from the eyes of others. The Bible keeps the secrets of intimacy, chastity and freedom of these meetings.

The words of the Magnificat point to the importance in Israel of learning with the heart and spirit. Mary's hymn of praise extols God's deeds with the paradox they imply. In Mary's song, God's works are unexpected and indescribable. For example, it speaks of the real (and not simulated) upturning of values. The poor and the rich, service and the kingdom, to be hungry and to be fed, human and divine, all is changed. Mary's song demonstrates the highest theology, not of the kind studied in books, but that which is born from long experience, and even so remains incredible. God does not appear as a projection of our ideas, but as a Sovereign who cannot be fully comprehended. Those who enter his kingdom will themselves become sovereigns, because only those who are free can tolerate other free people around them (Thomas Aquinas): his servant Abraham, his servant Mary, his servant

Israel. This clear insight puts an end to mythical dreams and images and to irresponsible actions. God chose a specific people, a specific tribe, and a specific person to be his mother.

Clarity of insight is typical of the spirit of the Bible, and this is also a characteristic of the cultural and religious background to Mary's hymn.

4. THE EARLY CHURCH

Throughout the centuries people have tried to follow the inimitable example of Jesus and to embrace the *logos* in words and deeds. In fact, there is a kind of objective historical miracle in Christianity. Saint Paul was the first to formulate this concept. Perhaps the quotation is too well known, but it has not yet exhausted its revolutionary content: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal 3: 28*). The world of evident differences (between ethnic groups, social classes and the sexes) is suspended. No school of philosophy in the ancient world had ever expressed such a concept. If we think about this immortal and previously unheard message (not even from Socrates), then we understand how even the famous declaration of human rights is no more than a new intonation of this palaeo-christian melody. This new melody is the concept of a free person, independent of sex, education, status, tribe and race, with or without potential. This statement guided Christianity forward with respect to the other religions of antiquity, placing it like dynamite into the course of history. It was dynamite for religious prejudices regarding who could be admitted into the cult of the gods (for example, the cult of Mithras where only men were admitted), for these were the ones who could be regarded as human. Whenever Greece spoke about liberty, *eleutheria*, it meant the freedom of a limited number of men who belonged to the upper class of the *polis* who were not slaves or women or barbarians. Only men from that

social class were regarded as human. The rest, the majority, were considered to be non-human. On the other hand, when Paul spoke about freedom, he included everyone. Redemption means precisely freedom from inequality and discrimination.

It was women who first perceived the end of slavery, including religious slavery. Consequently, they were freed from a role that was only determined by their body and its consequent use and abuse: being used as sexual objects, as objects of fascination and harassment, as a fertile womb able to generate numerous children, as a witch whose magic could control the life-giving and deathly powers of the subconscious, as a servant and as a mortal being without volition, as a symbol of the cult of the great anonymous goddess (as in the fertility rites) – in any case, as a being that has no individuality of her own and no freedom to be herself. The distinct personality of Christian women did not only include motherhood, erotic powers or domestic work, but a “new name” that we hear of in the *Apocalypse* and of which Saint Paul speaks clearly by defining it as “the freedom of the children of God”.

The path was paved for this concept in the Old Testament and this can be traced historically. Thousands of women in the world of Ancient Greece had already converted to the Jewish religion. Moreover, in the Old Testament there are no goddesses of fertility or sacred prostitution, but there were women judges and prophets and mothers of the faith. The Christian religion began its victorious ascent from the new Jewish communities in the eastern Roman Empire. In the Christian communities women were more numerous. They played an exceptional role in the founding and spreading of Christianity, and this is demonstrated in the well-known list of names in Saint Paul’s *Letter to the Romans* that includes Phoebe the deacon. It is indisputable that in the early centuries of the Church there was a huge stream of women who joined. This was because the Church had developed a culture in which women could be independent, whether they were virgins or widows, unlike in the culture of that time that denied rights to so many married women, not to men-

tion the women in slavery. The philosopher Celsus, well known as an opponent of Christianity, wrote disparagingly in the second century that: "Christian life is lived only in the cellars of society: in the rooms of women, the shops of shoemakers, and the buildings of craftsmen". He suggested that no attention should be given to this new sect that presented no threat. He was very mistaken. Already in the first century, the extraordinary influx into the Church of women who had become aware of their identity led to the fact that the young communities did not seem to have a high birthrate. Perhaps it is for this reason that we read in *1 Tim 2: 15*: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing". From this we see how Christian women right from the beginning understood this new way of conceiving their personality independently from home and husband. Personality is something that essentially and independently pertains to God. Great names are appearing from the darkness of time, names of women who belong to the history of ideas. There was Thecla, a follower of Saint Paul. There were the great martyrs Felicitas and Perpetua, and it was Perpetua who gave her newborn child into the care of others rather than renounce her faith. There was Macrina, the sister of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzen, who wrote beautiful letters about the spiritual life. There was Paula, who assisted Saint Jerome in translating the Bible. There were also many others whose writings have only partially come down to us. There are not only Fathers of the Church, but also Mothers of the Church.

These great spiritual characteristics belong to two thousand years of Christianity, and they have been expressed in different ways. It can be seen, for example, in the desert mothers who were hermits in the Egyptian desert. Motherhood had become a spiritual task, together with a new way of viewing normal motherhood which had acquired a clearly personal quality. The conception of women as being merely a source of eroticism was being replaced by an understanding of marriage as an act of love and fidelity on the part of both partners. This and the principle of monogamy and its reinforcement through a sacrament,

enhanced respect for women. The “cult of the dame” which arose in Provence in the twelfth century, is a sign of a completely new culture between the sexes. It honoured virginity, especially in the Mother of God, and it spread among the monastic orders that arose with different structures. Of course, there has not yet been a golden age, but there has been a hitherto unthinkable social dynamics that gave life to a “women’s history of Christianity” that has not yet been really written and that is not yet sufficiently present in current awareness. Throughout centuries of European history there have been women (like the great Catherine of Siena) who have depended entirely on the inspiration of the Spirit of God and on their own individual mission. The monasteries were particularly vibrant and fruitful with autonomous and cultured and also artistic women. Here there arose programmes of education for women. History tells us that it was in the monasteries that women’s “self awareness” arose, far more than the restricted views of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could identify. The protestant abolition of the monastic orders and consecrated virginity can be regarded as a step backwards.

5. PROBLEMS AND TASKS

However, the fact is that the practical anthropology of daily life and juridical practice are different from the theoretical foundations of the Old and New Testaments. The waves of Christianisation that first swept through the Mediterranean world, and then to the Germanic and Slavic peoples, always had to integrate within new civilisations that were based on the differentiation and inequality of the sexes. Therefore, it was only through the work of centuries that discrimination between the sexes could be eliminated. The nineteenth century brought the ultimate victory with equal rights and opportunities for women, that concluded with juridical and political freedom for individuals, regardless of sex.

This battle was not led by religious but by “enlightened” reasons. The Church was not always on the rational side of the argument (although rationality is part of the Church’s inheritance). For several decades now, a suspicion has worried the feelings and emotions of many faithful women that the Judaeo-Christian tradition is possibly hindering the new “enlightened” relationship between the sexes.

Moreover, the faith is under pressure, and some of the reasons stem from renewed interest in ancient cultures. The study of matriarchal cultures and other civilisations has opened up new areas of research where female goddesses and priestesses are autonomous and independent, and they attract interest because of their exotic intrigue. Many feminist groups believe that if we look back to these mothers of antiquity, it could bring about the creation of a new *pantheon*, a realm of “woman power”. The Christian feminism of the nineteen eighties and nineties has many theories concerning a maternal God and a female Holy Spirit.

These pressures on Christianity from within as well as from outside, must be taken seriously. We ask how it was that in the sixteenth century, Saint Teresa of Avila used to teach the sisters a prayer of thanksgiving to God for having given them a vocation to monastic life and not to marriage where they would only be beaten. We ask why Tertullian declared that women were the “entrance door to the devil”. We ask why, in the seventeenth century, Mary Ward had to meet so much opposition to her great project for the education of girls when the reason given was that she was “only a woman”. In all the Christian confessions during the nineteenth century, there was a clear distinction made between the duties of men and those of women, and women clearly had a subordinate role.

The memory of all these facts is imprinted into the sensibilities of the present generation. However, the principle truth is obscured by these emotions. It was only in the Judaeo-Christian culture that the humanisation of women arose (and also the humanisation of man, which is another unwritten chapter of history). We can learn from Saint

Paul, who interpreted Jesus' words and deeds, about the concept of being a person, before and beyond biology, before and beyond any levelling of the divine concept and plan for humanity. It was only in the Judaeo-Christian context that there arose a Christian feminism understood as humanism. It was only in the Judaeo-Christian context that a *querelle des femmes* was developed (beginning in the fourteenth century) brought about through the stimulus of the Gospel.

It does not make any sense to refer to the cultures of the mother goddesses. They are only symbols of anonymous fertility, of impersonal reproduction. These goddesses say nothing about the social status of women, and if they do speak, it is not favourable to women. In fact, research on matriarchal cultures found a series of "unfashionable" surprises. For example, the exclusion of women from the juridical and political hierarchy. Of course, there is the power of female fertility, the spell of erotic power, but in this respect, woman is only a function of her biology. Many ancient statues of mother goddesses show a voluminous body but almost no head, and almost all the appellations given to women (*gyne, femina, Weib, bab*) derive from the names for genital organs. In classical China, there was one woman responsible for the children, a second for refined erotic techniques, and a third for beauty and intelligence to accompany a man in society. Such a threefold division of woman according to her "use" is not at all desirable but quite usual in polygamous civilisations.

After the long history of humanity and the current change in direction towards agnostic feminism in which the latest innovation is the "gender ideology" – which means the abolition of biological sexuality and the pure "construction" of sex –, it is time for the restoration of the ancient and ever new truth of the Incarnation and the meaning of the body and flesh. Christianity should become a stable stronghold for the women of the future that maintains the meaning of personal motherhood and of spiritual motherhood as they were understood in the early centuries, and of virginity understood as freedom and explicit

belonging to God, of being an upright and autonomous person. As in the early Church it was necessary to free women from being attributed only a biological value and sexual connotations, today and tomorrow it seems to be necessary to emphasise women's gift for children, for life, for monogamous fidelity, for social sensibility, and all of this with the accent and intonation of a personal and aware volition. The Church is flexible in its arguments and stable in its content. Flexibility is a sign of youthfulness.

We should restore the great heritage and dynamics of Revelation to guide us through today's numerous ideologies, like a town on a mountain peak. We should be – in the words of Euclides da Cunha – splendid like a yes in the surrounding sea of no.

**“So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27):
person, nature and culture**

BLANCA CASTILLA DE CORTÁZAR*

Clarifying difference in the sexed condition has become a very topical and problematic theme nowadays. The task is not easy because it requires that the foundations be established for a new vision of the cosmos that goes beyond the prominence of the One to which all else must be subordinated. This vision must accept the peaceful coexistence of the human dyad – image of the divine Triad –, where men and women, with a diversity of resources that are of the same category, are called to co-protagonism and co-responsibility. The result of their mutual cooperation is a source of fruitfulness in every field.

As the theme proposed for this address is very wide and full of questions of great significance and scope, I shall simply sift through the content and take the line of fundamentals rather than of specific questions. Nor do I intend to speak about the abundant bibliography in this area. I would prefer to dwell on the new and promising lines of clarification marked out by John Paul II.

First of all, I would like to address questions of theological and philosophical anthropology that concern the image of God, and then briefly connect them with some data from contemporary culture. I shall conclude by indicating tasks that I consider to be pending, and by giving some suggestions.

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1. “HE CREATED HIM” - “HE CREATED THEM”, KEY TO THE “UNITY OF THE TWO” IN JOHN PAUL II’S EXEGESIS

Karol Wojtyła’s intellectual outlook, guided by life experience and centred on the person, love and family, led him to a conviction that the human being is fulfilled in the double mode of man and woman. Before, in and after the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, he continued to develop this truth with sharp insight. He dealt with difficult prejudices that needed to be uprooted, reinterpreted biblical passages in which the “old” mentality did not allow “evangelical newness” to shine through with clarity, and reopened doors that were slightly ajar in Scripture and in patristics, but that were closed by the tradition of the succeeding period.

John Paul II was aware of the anthropological wealth of the Creator’s plan renewed by Redemption.¹ By using a personalistic anthropology, he redefined the question of man-woman difference and opened up a new horizon that needs to be explored and studied in depth, and brought to its ultimate conclusions. His point of departure is a rereading of the passages in *Genesis* where it can be seen that God thought of the creation of the human being in a special way: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness”, we read in *Gen* 1: 26. It seems to be an intimate dialogue among the three divine persons. As a free and fruitful act of their own being and happiness, they think of and wish that there should exist in the visible world an expression of their own lives with their own style. On completing this work, the Creator is pleased on contemplating what has been accomplished: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (*Gen* 1: 31).

It is significant that in the central verse of the creation story, with which we are dealing today (*Gen* 1: 27), it speaks of the human being

¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, nos. 8-10.

both in the singular and in the plural. It says first that God created a human being and then it uses the plural to refer to the initial duality of man and woman. In this short clarification, we can already see an image of the Creator. In fact, the Trinity revealed in the New Testament is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, and this can be seen if we read one in light of the other. Therefore, when the One God says “Let us make”, it is because the intimacy of God is not a solitary being. In God there are three distinct persons at the same ontological level. Revelation has revealed a difference within the divinity that does not change the equality. According to Scola,² it is only recognition of a difference in these characteristics that will allow us to recognise the originality of the diversity of the sexed³ condition of the human being. As emphasised in the *Genesis* passage, in “one” human being who at the same time is “two”, the very mystery of God appears to be reflected. The “one” as well as the “two” in the human being is original and indeducible, and the “unity of the two” – “uni-duality” –, that John Paul II spoke about, would be an image of the divine “Triunity”.

The divine image in the human being has traits of the divine intimacy that include, among others, unity and plurality combined, and difference tied to equality.

1.1. *A new point of departure for the theology of the imago Dei*

However, the question of God’s image that “constitutes the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology”⁴ has not yet succeeded

² Cf. A. SCOLA, *L'esperienza elementare. La vena profonda del magistero di Giovanni Paolo II*, Genova-Milano, 2003.

³ I am deliberately using the term “sexed” and not “sexual”. In this I am following the example of the Spanish thinker Julián Marías. As it has a wider meaning and takes in all dimensions of the person, it avoids confusing the part for the whole, as can happen in Freudian principles (cf. J. MARIAS, *Antropología metafísica*, Madrid 1970, 160).

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

in taking its rightful central place in Christian anthropology.⁵ Its conceptualisation has been progressing slowly and with difficulty in various cultural contexts.⁶ In this sense it is important to point out that John Paul II renewed and expanded the theology of image by giving it new coordinates.⁷ The first and most basic new coordinate is the discovery, on reading the sacred text, that the *imago Dei* is an *imago Trinitatis*. The second axis is represented by personalistic anthropology, on which Karol Wojtyła concentrated his philosophical work.

The Trinitarian image and personalistic anthropology are closely related, yet the significance that derives from this association has yet to be measured. It begins by transforming both the very concept of person and the theology of image. I shall now point out the assumptions and implications of this new approach.

1.2. *Broadening the concept of person*

The first assumption concerns the advances in the concept of person that have taken place over the course of the twentieth century. This concept describes first of all the unicity⁸ of each person. Each has some-

⁵ Cf. L.F. LADARIA, *Introducción a la Antropología Teológica*, Estella 1993, 68ff.

⁶ Kari Børresen examined the evolution of this question (cf. K.E. BØRRESEN, *Image of God and Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, Oslo 1991).

⁷ The Second Vatican Council, with the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (12, 22) brought something new in this sense. It signalled the way for the recuperation of the theology of the *imago Dei* by relating anthropology to Christology, which ties in with the initial patristic advances (cf. L.F. LADARIA, *Introducción a la Antropología Teológica*, op. cit., 63-66). John Paul II went a step further by relating anthropology with the Trinity through the mystery of Creation, clearly separating it from subsequent sin. This is the structure of his main work in which he develops the “theology of the body” (cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Pauline Books 2006).

⁸ Hannah Arendt spoke in sublime terms about human unicity: Unicity allows the new to emerge, that which was not there before, the inimitable. “The new, therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each

thing of the absolute which makes him/her an end and not a means, and for this reason each one must always be loved for him/herself.

Clearly the concept of person – unknown to the ancient Greeks –, is a contribution of Christianity to philosophy. It arose from the attempt to penetrate the mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation. This marked a deeper and more distinct quality of essence, substance or nature that allowed for further study of awareness of being.

Difference in God was conceptualised as person and described as “subsistent relation”.⁹ Relation, a term of a categorical nature placed in a different context, expands its meaning in order to express personal difference in God, similar to the way in which subsistence does not mean the same as substance. However, the first attempt to apply the notion of person to the human being – the celebrated and secularly repeated definition of Boethius¹⁰ – moved away from this description in a double sense, because he no longer spoke of subsistence but returned to the term substance without taking in the relational aspect. Many centuries had to pass before the transcendental dimension of the person could be regained,¹¹ still not widely disseminated, and the perspective of the *imago Trinitatis* could allow for integration of the relational aspect by means of two consecutive advances.

The first advance was forged through contemporary personalism and, leaning on experience – that a person alone would be a misfortune

birth something uniquely new comes into the world. With respect to this somebody who is unique it can be truly said that nobody was there before. If action as beginning corresponds to the fact of birth, [...] then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualisation of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals” (H. ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1998, 178).

⁹ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, qq. 29-30.

¹⁰ “Individual substance of rational nature” (S. BOETHIUS, *De duabus naturis*, 3: PL 64, 1343 C: *individua substantia rationalis naturae*).

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, towards the end of his life, realised that the radical difference of the person is not so much in a specific difference but is to be found at the transcendental level (cf. E. FORMENT, *Ser y persona*, 20, Barcelona 1983, 61-89).

because that which is most human, like language and love, requires a recipient –, it has incorporated the dimension of openness to the other¹² as a constituent element of the person. Progress is summed up in the well known statement in *Gaudium et Spes* that John Paul II never tired of repeating: “man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self”.¹³ The paragraph refers as much to the absolute value of each person as to the relational circle starting out from ourselves that makes our call to communion possible. *Mulieris Dignitatem* is explicit in this respect: “being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other ‘I’”.¹⁴ Subsequently, other documents have spoken of humanity as a relational reality¹⁵ and the person is described as relational subjectivity.¹⁶ This first expansion of the notion of the human person containing the relational aspect makes it possible to study the image of God further because, to use the words of John Paul II “this is a prelude to the definitive self-revelation of the Triune God: a living unity in the communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.¹⁷

1.3. *Exegesis of Genesis 2 in the light of Genesis 1*

Another important presupposition brought up by John Paul II surmounts the well known centuries-old exegetical difficulty presented by

¹² This assumes that the social dimension of human beings is above all a requirement of their personal being more than of their nature. An increasing number of authors are dealing with this issue.

¹³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

¹⁵ 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*, no. 6.

¹⁶ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican City 2005, no. 149.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

the two Creation accounts. If they were both interpreted literally they would indeed appear to be contradictory. John Paul II's hermeneutics, which presuppose the diversity of literary genres, propose that we interpret the obscure archaic passage in *Genesis 2* in the light of what was already stated in *Genesis 1*. One speaks of image, and in the other the yahwist metaphor of Adam's rib becomes its explanation.¹⁸

In the first account we notice that the man and woman appear together "from the beginning", the fruit of one single act of creation.¹⁹ The simultaneity of their origins where neither comes before the other is a Trinitarian reading, because in God, none of the co-eternal persons comes before or after the others, and is not greater or lesser than the others.²⁰

Consequently, the *Genesis 2* account does not expound a chronological narrative of the creation of humanity. It is a biblical parable intended to amply explain what is most profound in the Trinitarian image. Symbolical language, mythical and poetical, is seen as the most appropriate in order to express that which is difficult to put in objective terms, as is the case of the structure of human intimacy. The generic Adam affirms not so much his own real existence, but rather the two intrinsic aspects of the person. These are self-awareness on recognising himself to be superior to the natural world, the first meaning of original solitude, and the call to live for the other, in communion, the second dimension of the person, who alone can be formed on the basis of these two solitudes. The parable also explains the reason for which there were two "from the beginning" because "it is not good that the man should be alone" (*Gen 2: 18*). In this sense *Gaudium et Spes* tells us: "But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning 'male and female he created them' (*Gen 1: 27*).

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹ Cf. my study: *¿Fue creado el varón antes que la mujer? Consideraciones en torno a la antropología de la Creación*, Madrid 2005.

²⁰ Cf. *Symbolum Quicumque*, Dz-Sch, 75/39.

Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion”.²¹ To this, John Paul II added that the human being “cannot exist ‘alone’ (cf. *Gen 2: 18*); he can exist only as a ‘unity of the two’, and therefore in relation to another human person. [...] Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other ‘I’”.²²

Reading those two passages together gives a surprisingly new slant that prevails over an age-old interpretation that gave rise to repeated errors. These became obstacles that are still difficult to reverse today when gauging the man-woman difference. John Paul II’s exegesis, by accepting the achievements of modern hermeneutics, implies a change of course that brings to the discourse of theological anthropology a new and luminous point of departure.

1.4. *Overcoming the androgyny myth with the “unity of the two”*

This new interpretation of *Genesis* has helped to clarify debates that have continued for centuries. One of these is the androgyny myth. The literal exegesis of *Genesis 2* applied by the tradition of Israel was combined with Plato’s concept of the beginning of the human race recounted in *Symposium*,²³ and the solitary Adam was interpreted in the light of the androgyne of Aristophanes’ myth. The androgyne, originally one, was divided as the result of a punishment from the gods, and each suffering part went in search of its other half in order to recover its identity. Even though biblical revelation emphasises that sexual difference has no bearing on sin or punishment, it was supposed that, after the dream of Eden, the first Adam was converted into a man and a

²¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12.

²² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

²³ PLATO, *Symposium*, 189c-193d.

woman – both incomplete – each one being one half of humanity. This approach complicated further the mistaken understanding of complementarity that was derived from a literal reading of *Genesis 2* in which only the woman was a complement. This reached such a point that even today this category is still being brought into question.²⁴

John Paul II, from a personalistic point of view, takes a different approach. Woman appears in Creation as the “other ‘I’ in a common humanity”.²⁵ Another “I” is a way of saying another person. A person is already a “whole”, valued for him/herself, self-possessed, free and responsible with independence from others. What is held in common is humanity.

The two persons, however, have one characteristic: they are oriented one towards the other. They are called to unity, to which the expression “unity of the two” corresponds. This does not remove the personal unicity of each one but rather presupposes it. Therefore, a correct anthropology requires that we distinguish two levels of unity: the personal (moment of solitude before God and before the cosmos) and the “unity of the two” which transcends persons and is of an order that accepts difference.

So, the interpretation of human origin that is derived from the “unity of the two” makes it possible for a smooth and straightforward surmounting – definitively – of the influence of the androgyne. Not only is it a different approach from that of the androgyne, but it is totally the opposite. It is not one that makes two, but two that make one. If we look at the starting point in reverse, the point of arrival is expressed in a crescendo that reaches another ontological dimension.

²⁴ Scola omits this term in order to avoid using androgyne, and speaks only of “asymmetrical reciprocity”. Asymmetry refers to the range of different relationships that emerge from the “unity of the two”, almost all derived from family ties: betrothal, fatherhood, motherhood, filiation, brotherhood, friendship (cf. A. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery. 1. A theological sketch of man and woman*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2005).

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

The unity of the two allows another transcendental order to be reached, unknown and unattainable when using the Greek approach.

1.5. *The imago Trinitatis and the common mission*

In order to unravel the implications of the *imago Trinitatis* it is also essential to take the contents of *Genesis* 1: 28: “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’”. It is a mission to be fulfilled together, which in turn is double: family – for through its fruitfulness the earth would be filled – and work to care for and govern the world.²⁶

The entrusted task acquires a particular significance because the Trinitarian image seems to indicate that it should consist of a unity of three. The question immediately arises: why a unity of two and not three? The answer is found when we consider that the image is not meant to be the model but to be its reflection. The fact that the creature is not God is expressed in the fact that it is not three from the beginning. Nevertheless, the *imago Trinitatis* can be seen in the fact that the blessing opens up the two to the three by means of the dynamism of action,²⁷ and this is based on the unselfish self-giving of each one in love. Duality does not close in on itself but transcends it. From the “unity of the two” fruitfulness blossoms forth.

²⁶ An initial consideration on the mission would be that no created reality, neither the sexed duality nor the entrusted mission, has anything to do with sin. Likewise, we must not confuse the call to work with the difficulty it produces after sin. Neither dual unity nor procreation are directly linked to death – which would be a punishment – but rather with the mission to fill the world and with time, also a created reality, which actually explains that marriage is a temporal structure. Those who relate the sexed condition and death perhaps wish to express something different (cf. A. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, op. cit.).

²⁷ This particular *imago trinitatis* implies a certain priority of ethics in our knowledge of the human, which come into existence with many potentialities that only become reality through the exercise of freedom. Hannah Arendt has pointed out the importance of action for the human being, even though it refers only to action in public life (cf. H. ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, op. cit.).

A common mission means, on the other hand, that the three is not the result of the action of one or other separately but of the unity of the two. In this respect we could say that each one contributes half. What is evident in the transmission of life is also necessary in the care and transformation of the earth. Just as there would be no fecundity in the family without the differentiated contributions of the two, it is also true that without the resources of femininity or masculinity, it would not be possible to have sustainable development in the social, economic and cultural spheres. John Paul II declared: “The text of *Genesis* 2: 18-25 shows that marriage is the first and, in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call (to exist mutually). But it is not the only one. The whole of human history unfolds [...] in humanity itself, in accordance with God’s will, the integration of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’”.²⁸

In procreation the structure of giftedness of man and woman is transformed into fatherhood and motherhood, and in the family a triad appears: father-mother and child, that illustrate a Trinitarian image. Unity in action is “marked neither by a static and undifferentiated equality nor by an irreconcilable and inexorably conflictual difference” but by a relationship experienced “as a gift which enriches and which confers responsibility”.²⁹ What is specific to each one is not the diversity of functions but rather the way of carrying out a function, in the nuances that the condition of each one finds in order to solve the problems encountered, and even in the discovery of and approach to these problems.³⁰

In the end, the three, which is not there from the beginning, is presented as a task. However, as action ultimately sinks its roots in personal ontology, the human three continues to carry the stamp of duality,

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

²⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Women*, no. 8.

³⁰ Cf. J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Dublin 1972, no. 90. What is affirmed concerning women can be applied equally to men.

which is seen in the family where the child will also be either male or female.³¹ The radical triadic difference is only found in the intimacy of God.

1.6. “*Communion of persons*”, *plenitude of the image*

Once we have affirmed the “unity of the two” that transcends into the three, we continue to ask about the contents of the image. In the doctrinal evolution of the *imago Dei*, the Jews regarded Adam alone to be the image. Eve was derived. In the Christian tradition, in order to accept woman within the image, they arrived at the interpretation – in itself a step forward – that the image was in the soul and that the soul was sexless. At the same time, the male continued to be the image, while the woman was only considered as such when joined to the male, but never alone. Finally, woman as such was also admitted to the image.³² We must point out that *Mulieris Dignitatem* contains the first explicit declaration from the Magisterium that woman as woman is image of God.³³ This declaration has been repeated, as if to reaffirm a truth that had previously been absent.³⁴

In the subsequent development of the image, John Paul II goes from person to communion. He declared: “Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of com-

³¹ John Paul II pointed this out: “Man is created ‘from the very beginning’ as male and female: the life of all humanity – whether of small communities or of society as a whole – is marked by this primordial duality” (JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, no. 6).

³² Cf. K.E. BØRRESEN, “Imagen actualizada, tipología anticuada”, in: M.A. MACCIOCCHI, *Las mujeres según Wojtyła*, Madrid 1992, 181-188.

³³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no 6 (three times), 7 and 10 and others.

³⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* would later take this truth into account in various numbers: 355, 369-70, 2335. Number 1065 is particularly explicit: it says that woman comes as a ‘helpmate’ (*Gen 2: 18*) and thus represents God from whom our ‘help’ comes (*Ps 121: 2*).

munion. Right ‘from the beginning’, he is not only an image in which the solitude of a person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons”.³⁵

Certainly each person is image because each one is rational and free, and able to know and love God. This has been the point of departure of the theology of image in Western tradition. Through Saint Augustine, whose influence has been decisive for centuries, by means of the so-called “psychological analogy” the Trinitarian image is reflected in each person through the differences in their potentialities: memory, understanding and will. This clever analogy has one disadvantage in that, if it excludes others, it would leave out the image of interpersonal relations,³⁶ and that would be a major exclusion from human reality, as noted by Ratzinger³⁷ and other authors.³⁸ In fact, Augustine of Hippo considered the family analogy to be a mistaken concept, as it was formulated in his time.³⁹ After him, the door remained closed.⁴⁰

At the turn of the century, John Paul II once again declared that not only does one person in isolation not exhaust the Trinitarian image but does not constitute its fullness either. The “unity of the two”, a sign of interpersonal communion, is an important part of the *imago Dei*. This

³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 14 November 1979.

³⁶ Cf. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *De Trinitate*, XII, 7, 9; XII, 8, 13.

³⁷ “Saint Augustine carried out an explicit application of this theological affirmation – that the person in God is relationship – to anthropology. He tried to describe the human person as a reflection of the Trinity and to understand the human person from the standpoint of this concept of God. However, it is a pity that this cuts reality short in a decisive way, because he explains the internal processes of the human person starting from the three persons. He makes certain mental powers correspond to each of the persons, and understands the total human person in correspondence with the substance of God, so that the trinitarian concept of person is not applied to human reality in all its immediate force” (J. RATZINGER, *Palabra en la Iglesia*, Salamanca 1976, p. 173).

³⁸ See also, B. DE MARGERIE, “L’analogie familiale de la Trinité”, in: *Science et Esprit*, 24 (1972), 78-80.

³⁹ Cf. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *De Trinitate*, XII, 5, 5.

⁴⁰ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 93, a. 6.

idea is developed in *Mulieris Dignitatem*,⁴¹ marking a significant step forward as well as surmounting an anthropological and theological misdirection. According to Scola, this is a key theory that has not been fully explored by theology, and in which “can be found one of the most significant contributions of the Papal Magisterium. Its importance concerns the whole field of dogmatic theology” that needs a particular ontology for anthropology.⁴²

Therefore, in order to unravel the anthropological wealth involved, we need to look at it from various angles. We shall now indicate how communion fruit of love is produced in reciprocity.

1.7. *Reciprocity, a requirement for equality*

If to be a person is to live in relationship with others, then each person’s living “for” generates reciprocity which is, above all, an affirmation of the person. This also implies recognition that both are placed on the same ontological level. The fact that the Adam in Paradise could find no companion until he saw before his eyes someone who was “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen 2: 23*), signals a level of equality that can never be overlooked.⁴³ In this sense, *Mulieris Digni-*

⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7. In the Letter to Families, no. 6, John Paul II wrote: “The divine ‘We’ is the eternal pattern of the human ‘we’, especially of that ‘we’ formed by the man and the woman created in the divine image and likeness. The words of the Book of Genesis contain that truth about man which is confirmed by the very experience of humanity”.

⁴² A. SCOLA, “The anthropological and theological bases of the dignity and mission of woman in the Magisterium of John Paul II” in: *The Logic of Self-Giving*, International Meeting on “women”, Roma 1996, ed. Pontifical Council for the Laity, Vatican City 1997, 65; see also IDEM, *L’esperienza elementare*, op. cit., 142.

⁴³ The purpose of “a helper as his partner” spoken of in Genesis 2, understood as corresponding and reciprocal help, is that which permits the human person not to “sink into a sterile and, in the end, baneful encounter with himself. It is necessary that he enter into relationship with another being on his own level. Only the woman, created from the same ‘flesh’ and cloaked in the same mystery, can give a future to the life of the man. It is

tatem leaves no room for ambiguity: “only the equality resulting from their dignity as persons can give to their mutual relationship the character of an authentic *communio personarum*”.⁴⁴

What stands out most in this question is that some biblical passages seem to express the unilateral submission of the woman. Once again, the clarification on this given by John Paul II is particularly important. At least two questions require an answer: why is there apparent ambivalence in scripture between reciprocity and unilaterality? Which of the two relationships responds to the biblical message?

In the section entitled “the Gospel innovation”, John Paul II continues his analysis by giving some clarifications on the analogy of the Christ-Church spousal love in the *Letter to the Ephesians*, using the hermeneutic keys that we referred to earlier: the *imago Trinitatis* and personalistic anthropology. The first difficulty arises when we realise that while the *imago Trinitatis* is based on the analogy between the intimacy of God and human intimacy, with plurality of persons at each level, the binomial Christ-Church is not situated on the same plane.

The exegesis begins by relating the spousal love in *Ephesians* 5: 31 with the institution of marriage in *Genesis* 2: 24: “In this love there is a fundamental affirmation of the woman as a person” in which both the man and woman reach fulfilment with “the sincere gift of self”. With this point of departure, the subjection of woman is relocated to the context of “mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ” from the same letter of Saint Paul (cf. *Eph* 5: 21). In this passage, the reason for justifying the apparent unilateralism was the husband’s supposed status as head on being compared to Christ’s in relation to the Church. John Paul II points out the difference that exists between the two realities.

therefore above all on the ontological level that this takes place, in the sense that God’s creation of woman characterizes humanity as a relational reality” (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*, no. 6).

⁴⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no 10.

He sustains that “whereas in the relationship between Christ and the Church the subjection is only on the part of the Church, in the relationship between husband and wife the ‘subjection’ is not one-sided but mutual”.

In this way he clarifies that a unilateral interpretation of the texts does not respond to the evangelical message and, in that regard, he presents reciprocity as an ‘innovation’: “In relation to the ‘old’ this is evidently something ‘new’: it is an innovation of the Gospel”. He concludes by saying: “But the challenge presented by the ‘ethos’ of the Redemption is clear and definitive. All the reasons in favour of the ‘subjection’ of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a ‘mutual subjection’ of both”.

Now, after responding to the second question, how can we resolve the apparent ambivalence of Scripture and the fact that its literal interpretation seems to be opposed to its true meaning? John Paul II states the difficulty by saying: “We find various passages in which the apostolic writings express this innovation, even though they also communicate what is ‘old’: what is rooted in the religious tradition of Israel, in its way of understanding and explaining the sacred texts, as for example the second chapter of the Book of Genesis”. As we can see, a correct interpretation of *Genesis* 2 is crucial in order to discover a difference that does not prejudice equality.

Having arrived at this point, allow me to draw your attention to a question that needs to be clarified: it is necessary to repeat with John Paul II that all interpretations that prejudice reciprocity do not belong to the Gospel innovation nor to the biblical message, but to the judgement of the cultural context that conditions them. As John Paul II emphasised, the Gospel innovation has to lead the way in changing minds and hearts and to eradicate a mentality that is more difficult and slower to overcome than the arduous path that led to the abolition of slavery.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no 24.

1.8. *Ontological complementarity, the key to difference*

After having dealt with the question of reciprocity in the relationship between the sexes, which is the first and fundamental step, we must now proceed further. In order to do this, I shall set out from a statement made in another Church document. It sustains that the diversity of the sexes determines a person's identity and that this distinction "is directly ordained both for the communion of persons and for the generation of human beings".⁴⁶ It can be seen in this that the intra-trinitarian *communio personarum* and communion between man and woman are similar in that they are a communion between persons who are relationally distinct.

The category used by John Paul II to express the difference is that of complementarity. With these new keys he begins to speak of "reciprocal complementarity", thus correcting the interpretation according to which only the woman was the complement. This notion, once the previous inconvenient ones were clarified, widened its significance and acquired progressive relevance. Thus, in 1995, it was declared that complementarity is not only biological and psychological, but also ontological.⁴⁷

When referring to ontological complementarity he explains that "When the Book of Genesis speaks of 'help', it is not referring merely to acting, but also to being".⁴⁸ We find ourselves at the constituent level, which explains the functional order. John Paul II also explains that the "unity of the two" is a "relational uni-duality".⁴⁹ Relationship, therefore, is like the key to explaining the unity of equals in their difference, in a way similar to how God "the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

⁴⁶ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration *Inter insigniores*, no. 5.

⁴⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Women*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

one God through the unity of the divinity, exist as [distinct] persons through the inscrutable divine relationship”.⁵⁰

Now, the question rests on how to discover the difference in the relationships. If we return to the passage in *Genesis 2*, once that we have established the simultaneousness of their origins, we discover in Adam a certain reason of principle – origin – and in Eve a certain reason of purpose. We could conclude that the deeper significance of the Yahwist parable – that Eve came from Adam’s rib – is that it reveals a relationship of derivation from the beginning similar to those existing within the Trinity, which are formed as distinct persons. This is the only example of a derivation that is different from filiation that the Fathers of the fourth century found in Scripture, a derivation that communicates the same nature. For this reason they saw in the origin of Eve an image of the procession of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹

In the field of anthropology, relationships are known through the phenomenological description of action that leads to being. The method of procreation expressively presents motherhood as a relationship different from fatherhood. The man, through self-giving, comes out of himself and commits himself to the woman, and his gift remains in her. A woman gives herself, but without going out of herself, by accepting within herself. Their different ways of giving themselves are complementary, for without the woman the man would have nowhere to go, and likewise, without him, she would have no one to receive. The difference between those two relationships is in their being oriented one to the other. This in turn makes the “unity of the two” possible, because if both were facing in the same direction, they would move in parallel and never meet.

In order to express these differences ontologically we need a further

⁵⁰ IDEM, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

⁵¹ Father Antonio Orbe found a long tradition in eastern patristics. Cf. A. ORBE, “La procesión del Espíritu Santo y el origen de Eva”, in: *Gregorianum* 45 (1964) 103-118.

expansion of the notion of person so as to encompass the complementarity that gives place to unity within relational openness. This is the spousal structure of the person. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II states that human relationships have a spousal characteristic,⁵² a point that he develops in the theology of the body when he suggests that the body in itself has a spousal significance.

Taking into account that relationships do not have a name by nature, the most appropriate grammatical terms to express them are not the nouns, nor even the pronouns that refer to persons, but the prepositions. Examples are: the preposition “from” would correspond to the man, because from himself he gives to others, and to the woman the preposition “in”, because she opens up and receives within herself. Integrated in general relational openness, the man could be described as a “being-with-from” or “being-for-from”, and the woman as “being-with-in” or “being-for-in”. In this way, the action of being human, described in a general way as “being-with” or “being-for”, would encompass the dyad.⁵³

Observed from the viewpoint of the *imago Trinitatis*, the spousal structure is a manifestation of ontological wealth,⁵⁴ as it is the basis that explains why the fullness of humanity is only found in self-giving. This

⁵² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

⁵³ This relational structure has consequences on action: “The biblical vision of the human person suggests that problems related to sexual difference, whether on the public or private level, should be addressed by a relational approach and not by competition or retaliation” (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*, no. 8).

⁵⁴ “Contrary to what Plato thought, the dyad has transcendental value, and this is an advantage. It is superior to the *monon*. Monism is a burden that comes from metaphysics and that must be controlled in anthropology. This is the only way that transcendental anthropology can begin. Co-existence implies duality. If monism is accepted and the supremacy of the one is accepted, then duality is imperfection and it has to be derived from monism. Plotinus saw plurality as fragmentation and dispersion of the one” (L. POLO, *Presente y futuro del hombre*, Madrid 1993, 161).

new vision implies a change of direction that allows self-sufficiency to be replaced as a model of excellence and enables advances to be made in anthropology. This is because those who consider the duality of the sexes to be a manifestation of creaturely contingency⁵⁵ come to consider it as something positive in spite of being a limitation.⁵⁶ They begin to recognise that it is a sign of the absolute,⁵⁷ in the image of God who is ultimate perfection and yet in whom each Person alone could not exhaust the nature of God.

1.9. *The imago Trinitatis and the family analogy*

We have already pointed out that father-mother-child, as a triad relationship, becomes an *imago Trinitatis*. This is supported by Von Balthasar⁵⁸ and also by the Fathers of the Church before Saint Augustine.⁵⁹ John Paul II rediscovered the analogy of family from another

⁵⁵ A. SCOLA, “The anthropological and theological bases of the dignity and mission of woman in the Magisterium of John Paul II” in: *The Logic of Self-Giving*, op. cit., 60: “No man (or no woman) can, alone, be the whole of the human being; he or she is always confronted with the other inaccessible mode of being human. So, in the man-woman relationship we can discover the contingent character of the human creature: the I needs the other, depends on the other for fulfilment” (see also IDEM, *The Nuptial Mystery. 1. A theological sketch of man and woman*, op. cit.).

⁵⁶ IDEM, “The anthropological and theological bases of the dignity and mission of woman in the Magisterium of John Paul II”, op. cit., 60: “This contingent character not only identifies the limit of the human being, but also the human capacity for auto-transcendence in the discovery of the other as positive for the self”.

⁵⁷ After affirming that the contradictions that emerge from scientific-technological possibilities compel us to radically redefine conceptions of couple, family and paternity, he recognises that sexual difference in union with love and procreation, for which they are the reason and purpose, is not a contingent fact but has absolute value (cf. IDEM, *Una nuova laicità. Temi per una società plurale*, Venezia 2007, 111-112).

⁵⁸ “Perfect creaturely love is an authentic *imago Trinitatis*” (H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theo-logic*, vol. 3: “The Spirit of Truth”).

⁵⁹ In addition to the article by Father Orbe cited above, see also my work: “La Trinidad como Familia. Analogía humana de las procesiones divinas”, in: *Annales Theologici* 10 (1996) 381-416.

approach. When he thought about the intimacy of God, he became aware of the family ties therein. As early as 1979 he declared: “our God in his deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. This subject of the family is not, therefore, extraneous to the subject of the Holy Spirit”.⁶⁰ In 2004, on the basis of *Eph* 3: 14-15: “we bow our knees before the Father from whom all fatherhood and motherhood is named”, he explains that “in the light of the New Testament it is possible to discern how the primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself, in the Trinitarian mystery of his life”.⁶¹

What is certain is that in the Trinitarian mystery, the subsistent relationships formed by the Persons have a family characteristic. We see this in the name of the two that have been expressly revealed: fatherhood and sonship. From this standpoint we can say that, as in families it is evident that in the father, mother and child, each relationship in its distinction makes the other two possible, then it is all the more logical if in the Trinity – where the Triad is radical –, the third Person makes it possible for the Father to be Father and the Son to be Son.⁶² Although we need to re-examine this Person who is little known, clarification is given when we observe that the interdependence of these family relationships makes plausible the unity of the three.

⁶⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Homily at the Mass in Palafox Major Seminary in Puebla de Los Angeles, Mexico, 28 January 1979.

⁶¹ IDEM, *Letter to Families*, no. 6. Further on, he continues: “The family, which originates in the love of man and woman, ultimately derives from the mystery of God. This conforms to the innermost being of man and woman, to their innate and authentic dignity as persons” (*ibid.*, no. 8).

⁶² The question calls for a rethinking of the *Filioque*. This has begun under the express instructions of John Paul II; see PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, “The Greek and Latin Traditions about the Procession of the Holy Spirit”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English Edition, 20 September 1995, pp. 3 and 6. It explains how the Catholic Church understands this question. Each person could be seen, so to speak, as determined by the other two: cf. G. LEBLOND, “Point de vue sur la procession du Saint-Esprit”, in: *Revue tomiste*, t. 78, 86 (1978), 293-302, cited in the above document.

Returning to the idea that the three, to which it is open, has to be in some way within the dyad as potentiality, the question arises about the ontological passage of the three to the two. In other words, if father-mother-child, as a triad relationship is in the *imago Trinitatis*, in what way does fatherhood, motherhood and filiation contract to the duality man-woman? The answer could be that filiation – with respect to the progenitors and to God – is a relationship that is constitutive both to the man and the woman. As sons and daughters, men and women do not differ but rather they are identical. For that reason we could say that their difference lies in the presence in each one of fatherhood or motherhood (understanding these as potentialities and ways of contributing to the welfare of others). To be male implies filiation and fatherhood, and to be female implies filiation and motherhood. In conclusion, the openness of the human person could not be simple as it is in each divine Person, but it is the sum of two constitutive relationships. In any case, we can say that the spousal structure (man-woman) has, all in all, a family quality.

1.10. *Person, body and sex*

The innovations observed in John Paul II's Theology of the Body, that I shall speak about next, come from the same keys to interpretation that structure all his thinking and that keep him from separating the body from the person. The first is that "the body is the expression of the person".⁶³ Following the eastern tradition, he states that what is innermost is expressed in the visible. This also means that if the body changes, the person is no longer the same, a point also noted by Habermas.⁶⁴ When he states that the body has a sacramental significance, he understands that it makes visible the invisible.

⁶³ K. WOJTYŁA, *The Acting Person: A Contribution to Phenomenological Anthropology*, Analecta Husserliana - the Yearbook of Phenomenological Research. Volume X.

⁶⁴ "A person is man or woman, having one or other of the sexes, and cannot be of the other sex without also becoming another person": J. HABERMAS, *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur*, Frankfurt 2001.

If the body is an expression of the person, then the characteristics proper to that person – unicity and relational openness – must be expressed in corporeity. DNA, the iris or fingerprints denote the inimitable quality, and openness could be expressed precisely in the sexual condition. This could explain the statement that “sex is a constituent part of the person”,⁶⁵ which means that the body’s manifestations of sex express something deeper that shapes the person. When he claims that the body has a spousal or “nuptial meaning”⁶⁶ he is saying that a person’s call to love is reflected in the body, which is materially capable of expressing love in two distinct ways.

The same source led to his conclusion that the body and sex – masculinity and femininity face to face – form part of the *imago Dei*,⁶⁷ because each body concedes to the other by expressing its call to love and communion.⁶⁸ The sexed condition of the body is a manifestation

⁶⁵ JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 21 November 1979, in: IDEM, *The Theology of the Body*, Boston 1997, 49.

⁶⁶ The expression returns frequently after the audience of 9 January 1980. In the general audience of 16 January 1980, no. 4, he states: “The human body, oriented interiorly by the sincere gift of the person, reveals not only its masculinity or femininity on the physical plane, but reveals also such a value and such a beauty as to go beyond the purely physical dimension of sexuality. In this manner awareness of the nuptial meaning of the body, connected with man’s masculinity-femininity, is in a way completed. On the one hand, this meaning indicates a particular capacity of expressing love, in which man becomes a gift. On the other hand, the capacity and deep availability for the affirmation of the person corresponds to it” (JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 16 January 1980, in: *The Theology of the Body*, op. cit., 63).

⁶⁷ “Man, whom God created male and female, bears the divine image imprinted on his body ‘from the beginning’. Man and woman constitute two different ways of the human ‘being a body’ in the unity of that image” (JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 2 January 1980, in: *The Theology of the Body*, op. cit., 58). He thus retrieved an ancient tradition, because already in the second century Saint Irenaeus clearly sustained that the human person is the image of God even in his/her corporeality (cf. IRENAEUS OF LYON, *Adversus Haereses*, V, 6, 1; V, 9, 1-2).

⁶⁸ “The body which expresses femininity [‘for’ the masculinity and viceversa the masculinity ‘for’ the femininity] manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons” (JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 9 January 1980, in: *The Theology of the Body*, op. cit., 61-62).

of something within, the relational openness in two complementary directions of the person, and this constitutes the deeper meaning of sexuality. Therefore sex is constitutive of the person and not merely an attribute. Difference in sex is a reality from the beginning, indeducible, that cannot be disregarded, that is part of the absolute value and dignity of a person.

2. PERSON, NATURE AND CULTURE

In the light of the ideas dealt with above, we can undertake a discussion on nature and culture. However, due to its great scope and the little time available, I shall just give some brief observations in order to connect it to the present discussion on sex-gender. As they have similar parameters, it is related to our theme today.

2.1. *Nature, culture and the gender category*

Up to this point, we have used the term ‘nature’ several times. It is difficult to avoid this notion as one of its accepted meanings signifies the unity of humanity. However, we find ourselves faced with a century or more of controversy that sets nature against culture, and this makes it particularly difficult to clarify the term,⁶⁹ even if only because of the fact that dictionaries of philosophy point to the existence of hundreds of definitions distinguishing between the philosophical and the scientific meanings. In philosophy, its main definition denotes the essence or way of being of a reality considered as a principle of operations, but the concept of *physis*, applied both to the physical world and to human beings, was already polysemic for the Greeks. The moderns distinguish between nature – which implies necessity – and freedom. In the sciences

⁶⁹ Cf. J.M. BURGOS, *Repensar la naturaleza humana*, Madrid 2007.

that work in both fields, after the ambiguous period of jusnaturalism in recent decades when the notion of human nature was removed from post-modern philosophy and from the social sciences, in particular from law, it continues to survive in the scientific sphere among those with biologicistic points of view that claim that the human being is no more than a particularly complex animal.

The term 'culture' also has multiple meanings. Its etymology (from *cult*: *cultor* = cultivator, for example, agri-culture) shows that it is not far from that of 'nature', but in fact culture is not associated with necessity but rather with freedom. It acquired particular relevance with the advent of cultural anthropology, and now its meaning comes from this scientific perspective. There are some who describe it as information not genetically received⁷⁰ as it encompasses heredity and the possibilities brought about by the environment, as a point of departure for individual contribution.

It is a well-known fact that nature and culture blend together from the very start of human life. A human being is born defenceless and is in need of culture in order to develop, in such a way that all that is given biologically and that which is given culturally combine in an inseparable way. On the other hand, at the theoretical level, both notions coexist in a tense relationship where one term tends to absorb the other. According to Scola, this is due to a dualistic approach.⁷¹ There is no shortage of people who claim that the human being is only nature or only culture, pure determinism or pure freedom. Moreover, the man-woman difference has even been viewed by considering woman as nature and man as culture.⁷²

⁷⁰ Cf. J. MOSTERÍN, *Filosofía de la cultura*, Madrid 1993, 68.

⁷¹ Cf. A. SCOLA, *Una nuova laicità. Temi per una società plurale*, op. cit., 113-114.

⁷² Cf. S. ORTNER, "¿Es la mujer con respecto al hombre lo que la naturaleza con respecto a la cultura?", in: O. HARRIS – K. YOUNG (ed.), *Antropología y feminismo*, Barcelona 1979, 109-131.

Within this scientific setting there appeared in 1975 a sex-gender framework⁷³ with the intention of organising the multiple data used for the study of human sexuality. The sex schema was for the collection of data from the biological sciences and the gender category was for the sociological and cultural (identities, the roles and the various constructs of relationships between the sexes, including the range of beliefs, preferences, attitudes and activities).⁷⁴ The term gender is therefore not synonymous with the term sex nor is there any reason why it should be ideologised. It is a necessary category for social and cultural analysis in order to distinguish the different models contained within it.⁷⁵ From the juridical viewpoint, it has been a means of arbitrating equality policies,⁷⁶ but as also happens with the sex category, as they are used today, they are scientific notions that do not exhaust and do not manage to explain human reality.

The growing power of scientific-technical means, together with ideologies that pin down the meaning of gender – using the concept in an incorrect way –, is filtering the idea that to change or even cancel sex would be an achievement for human freedom, which paradoxically would bring us to a new stage of evolution where the body would be transformed into a *cyborg*.⁷⁷ The current oscillation between a fixist naturalism and a culturalism that is in a constant process of development impels good sense to find a sure path between the two opposing positions. It so happens that, rather than partial proposals, the definitive way out requires the opposing terms to be moved to a context that tran-

⁷³ Cf. G. RUBIN, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, in: R. REITER (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York/London, 1975.

⁷⁴ Cf. P. DONATI, “La famiglia come relazione di gender: morfogenesi e nuove strategie”, in: IDEM (ed.), *Uomo e donna in famiglia*, Cinisello Balsamo 1997, 25-91.

⁷⁵ Cf. M. ELÓSEGUI, *Diez temas de género*, Madrid 2002, 45-92.

⁷⁶ Cf. DURÁN Y LALAGUNA, *Sobre el género y su tratamiento en las Organizaciones internacionales*, Madrid 2007.

⁷⁷ Cf. D.J. HARAWAY, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*, London 1991.

scends them and allows them to recover their natural philosophical content and connect it to that of culture.

2.2. The person as radical enclave of the human

It is impossible to disregard something held in common and immutable that includes all that each human being receives. In order to establish it there have been attempts to use the less controversial word human ‘condition’. However, the question consists in knowing if the perennial and nuclear nature of the human being is found only in biological sex or rather, going beyond any physical-chemical laws, is also found in universal mental and spiritual structures. Leaving aside arguments on the topic, who can deny that to have genome, intelligence and hands, intimacy or capacity for language, are not signs of something common to all human beings? Culture, throughout history, brings about development – with different variants – of these human abilities. However, there is something more: personal unicity. Through human experience, the concept of person individualised by nature is discovered, and although each one is inimitable, all human beings coincide in that they all have this unicity. From the person as the most radical enclave of the human, both nature and culture could be redefined, because this concept allows for a different articulation of freedom and necessity, or rather, freedom and truth.

Starting from the person, what is being redefined is primarily freedom. A human being is free because of being a person⁷⁸ and it is this freedom – a primordial feature of the human –, that means a person is no longer imprisoned by some power of nature. However, freedom is not the only value, because the person also reveals an intrinsic dignity from which inalienable rights derive, and they demand that freedom be

⁷⁸ Cf. L. POLO, *Persona y libertad*, Pamplona 2007.

exercised with responsibility when laws are established that command respect and that discern legitimacy in the exercise of freedom. From the person and the intrinsic dignity of the person, freedom loses the exclusive value that justifies everything but rather demands that it be supported by the truth of the person, the source of moral awareness. Human freedom, as Zubiri would say, is a relative absolute that finds its direction and guide within the person, in which it is embedded. Freedom has laws, and being laws of love and respect, they belong to a different order to that which rules the cosmos.

There is another meaning in the concept of human nature, one of the most important: that which gives meaning, a mission to freedom, that is recovered today when we speak of the dignity of the person. The dignity of persons, incorporating their body and sex, is the category that could express nature and freedom in current language as it recognises that the human being is not only freedom but also has dignity as another aspect of freedom, its task and achievement. To respect the dignity of others is not so much a limitation as a success of freedom. As a result, the meaning of culture is transformed. It is not only a heritage that is received extragenetically but that is above all the free and creative result of action, that modifies the exterior and the person who carries it out, always attentive to the demand for dignity. Cultural structures created through freedom can be structures of sin that go against the dignity of the person. In this sense the models of gender in the past and present often show this discord, while the legitimacy of the so-called equality policies should be based on their accordance with dignity.

On the other hand, body and sex inserted in the cosmos and sharing to a certain extent the needs of its laws, as they are radical expressions of the person, they are the sphere in which they are joined to the dignity of the person. The body and biological sex are part of the absolute value and dignity of the person, and it is on these concepts that the models of gender, founded on freedom, should be based.

3. PENDING TASKS

Up to this point I have tried to summarise and, with the help of John Paul II, go beyond the obstacles that have been hindering the search for resources needed in dealing with the present inadequacy of tools to express the reality of sexual difference. I have also noted the new vistas opened up by the Pontiff. Now I shall make some other proposals to help continue to resolve pending issues. The first regards the limitations of biblical symbology, and the others are aimed at overcoming the predominance of the undifferentiated “one”.

3.1. *New solutions to the limitations of the spousal analogy*

Kari E. Børresen wrote that *Mulieris Dignitatem* presents an updated *imago Dei* and an antiquated typology.⁷⁹ She was referring to one of the difficulties presented by the hermeneutics of biblical symbology in expressing anthropological difference. She notes that the Bridegroom and the bride represent hierarchical ontological levels because the Bridegroom is always God or Christ and the bride is humanity. A literal reading would imply that to be a bride is to be a creature. If this consequence, which seems inevitable, is dressed in the world vision of prestige of the one and the consequent subordination, it seems to justify the fact that we speak of the principle (and also the right) of the man's role as head as a sign of pre-eminence. The same hierarchical structuring can be seen in the theological formulating of Mary as the new Eve, while Christ is the new Adam. The first limitation of the symbolic dimension is, therefore, that it blurs reciprocity in equality.

There is, moreover, a second objection that is no less important. The symbol of bride includes men as well as women, and this hinders us from perceiving a difference that is presented as radical. The mystical

⁷⁹ Cf. K.E. BØRRESEN, “Imagen actualizada, tipología anticuada”, *op. cit.*, 181-195.

theory – especially present in Saint John of the Cross –, according to which the fact that the man stands before God as bride has a spiritual significance, seems forced when applied to anthropology. Here, Christ the bridegroom is the model for men, including in the way he treats women. However, in his address, John Paul II, perhaps through the influence of the mystic saint, does not define these two affirmations that are incompatible anthropologically because each represents an opposing conclusion to the same relationship. Nevertheless, we do find in his thought the solution to overcoming these limitations. This is none other than to continue using the same hermeneutical strategy in redoing exegesis on the passages in Genesis in order to reinterpret the spousal analogy. As we said before, John Paul II used the *nexus misteriorum* and contemplated the rest in the light of the Trinity.

The proposal was put forward by Von Balthasar who was convinced that the man-woman distinction is part of the *imago Dei*. He said: “If this were not so, Christ could neither have pointed to the relationship of the sexes to describe his mysterious union with the Church”.⁸⁰

If we take the *imago Dei* as the *imago Trinitatis*, if being a woman as such means to be an image of God, then to be a bride – another way of saying woman –, should not mean to be outside the divine image. On the other hand, there are plenty of passages in Holy Scripture in which God, personified as Wisdom, is also presented as bride and mother,⁸¹ for which reason it would be natural to wonder which divine archetype is the one in whose image woman was created. As regards the man, he could relate to the Pauline teaching that God the Father is the beginning of all fatherhood in the heavens and on earth (cf. *Eph* 3: 14-16), on the basis of the principle that in the yahwist text it is activated in the man. This relocates all the hierarchical interpretations concerning his role as head, because the fact that it is in God the Father that divinity

⁸⁰ H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *The Christian State of Life*, San Francisco 1983, 103.

⁸¹ See, among others: *Wis* 8: 2; 8: 9; *Sir* 14: 26-27; 15: 1-6; 24: 18-21.

begins does not mean that he comes before or has greater dignity than the other persons of the Trinity.

Mulieris Dignitatem number 29 introduces a Trinitarian line of reasoning by speaking of the “order of love”, to a certain extent parallel to the order – *taxis* – of the persons in God, which is not temporal. “The order of love belongs to [...] the life of the Trinity. In the intimate life of God, the Holy Spirit is the personal hypostasis of love. Through the Spirit, Uncreated Gift, love becomes a gift for created persons”.⁸² John Paul II continues along these lines by making a parallel comparison between the Holy Spirit and woman: “The calling of woman into existence at man’s side [...] provides the visible world of creatures with particular conditions so that ‘the love of God may be poured into the hearts’ of the beings created in his image”.⁸³ Although he does not say what these particular conditions are, the Pontiff concludes by distinguishing between the way husband and wife love according to a certain order: the husband is the one who loves in order to be loved and the wife receives love in order to love.⁸⁴

On the other hand, if we develop ecclesiology by starting out from the *imago Trinitatis*, this could bring about surprising results as it would employ data dispersed in the patristics. For Saint Irenaeus, the Word and the Holy Spirit are the hands of God,⁸⁵ and are therefore the movers of history, we could say, each one at the same level. According

⁸² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 29.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ This is the conclusion that is reached in *Mulieris Dignitatem* in which John Paul II “has developed illuminating ideas on the centrality of women’s role in the new evangelisation in today’s world. A woman, he said, is placed by God as a special witness of the ‘order of love’. ‘God entrusts the human being to her in a special way’, so that women may be for humanity almost a living revelation of the love with which God loves each one of us” (Á. DEL PORTILLO, Homily of 14 February 1990, in: *Una vida para Dios*, Madrid 1992).

⁸⁵ Cf. IRENEAUS OF LYON, *Adversus Haereses* IV, Praef. 4; 20, 1; V, 1; 6, 1; see also AMBROSE, *Explanatio Psalmorum* 118, 10, 17.

to Saint Methodius, Christ's open side gave forth not so much the Church as the Holy Spirit who, being the fruit of the Cross, would form the Church.⁸⁶ Congar⁸⁷ called the third Person cofounder of the Church because the Church had not been definitively founded until Pentecost. The spousal analogy interpreted as reciprocity would complete Christ-Head with the Holy Spirit-Soul of the Church. At the human level we would have to study the Marian and apostolic-petrine dimensions in order to finally see a parallelism between both levels. It is not by chance, as we see in the Apocalypse, that the bride and the Spirit cry out together (cf. *Ap* 22: 17).

Nowadays it is encouraging to see the new approach being introduced to spousal hermeneutics by Angelo Scola in order to explain the family. He prefers to speak of the nuptial rather than the spousal because it is wider, and he warns that the "nuptial mystery" encompasses an original anthropological experience, with which we are all familiar. Moreover, we know that, like all that concerns the basics, it resists being objectivised. This experience is structured in three stages: sexual difference, the sincere self-giving of each one and fecundity,⁸⁸ where the first element acquires full meaning together with the other two.

In the end, the proposal is to reconsider the spousal analogy from the *imago Trinitatis*, and that would mean reconsidering difference in God. The family analogy would help in this by incorporating into the hermeneutics of *Genesis* 2 the insights of the patristics before the time of Saint Augustine, and by clarifying the archetype of the maternity of God. As analogy is a track that goes in both directions, another alterna-

⁸⁶ METHODIUS OF OLYMPUS, *Symposium*, III, c. 8, 72-73, SCH, n. 95, 108-109, in which he refers to the Spirit as "*Costa Verbi*": "For he may fitly be called the side (rib) of the Word, even the sevenfold Spirit of Truth, according to the prophet (cf. *Is* 11: 2)" (*Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers vol. 14: The Writings of Methodius*, Edinburgh 1883, 29).

⁸⁷ Cf. Y.M.J. CONGAR, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*, Paris 1980.

⁸⁸ Cf. A. SCOLA, *The Nuptial Mystery*, Grand Rapids 2005.

tive would be to think about the human family – filiation and fatherhood-motherhood, two different ways of giving life –, taking into account difference in the divine Persons.

3.2. *Ways to overcome the predominance of the undifferentiated One*

The philosophy of the monolithic “one”, an ontological version of the structure of the cosmos, is the main stumbling block when we think about difference. In philosophy there has never been recognition of a difference that is intertwined with equality. It is interesting to observe that when men took women into consideration, either they elevated them, placing them higher, or they subordinated them, placing them lower. Other times they put them behind or perhaps in front, but never side by side. When women wanted to affirm their identity, the alternatives tried out were: imitate man, or compete with him and supplant him, or else trivialise or repress any difference. The reason for not finding a suitable response is the absence of a philosophy that would make space for the different “two” at the same level. This absence means that there can only be underestimating, imitating, rivalling or denying one in order to affirm the other.

Although difference has always been present in philosophical questions, continuing its study today requires a surmounting of the *monon* and a widening of metaphysics that can explain anthropology. It must be done in a disciplinary framework with scientific proofs that cleanly sweep away secular prejudices, until we achieve the necessary conceptual arrangement to enable us to think about spousal structure, in the setting of the family structure of the person.

Following the development of the difference of forms, worked out by Greek philosophy, if difference is sought by means of opposing extremities, it ends up in nihilism. This is because the opposite of being is its negation, the nothing. This pitfall is avoided by accepting the *distinctio realis* between forms and the act of being which focuses on

another type of difference with the discovery of the transcendental order. The originality of Thomistic thought, lost and found again some decades ago, does not explain everything, but it marks a turning point.

Heidegger's ontological difference was a step forward in studying the insistence of the personalists in distinguishing between things and persons. It points out one difference between the cosmos and persons, and another between the persons themselves, as each one is unique and inimitable.⁸⁹ According to those who follow dialogism, to be a person means, moreover, that one cannot be alone but is a being "with-another" or "for-someone", and is relationally open. However, these advances obtained from experience have not yet been consolidated conceptually. If we take up the suggestions made in this discussion, attempts to advance could be carried out in three further steps: make transcendental anthropology known, allow for a philosophy of the dyad and concretize triadic relations. I shall briefly delineate each of the three points:

a) The proposal for a transcendental anthropology

The recently published transcendental anthropology by Leonardo Polo⁹⁰ proposes and develops an ontology that is proper and peculiar to the person, different from that of the cosmos, that amplifies classical metaphysics and at the same time specifies the *distinctio realis* and Heideggerian difference. He affirms that the cosmos in its entirety has just one act of being and that a person is inimitable because each one has his/her own act of being. The person is distinguished from the cosmos

⁸⁹ Hannah Arendt distinguishes between otherness, distinctness and unicity as being something exclusive to the human being: "In man, otherness, which he shares with everything there is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings" (H. ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., 176).

⁹⁰ Cf. L. POLO, *Antropología Transcendental* I and II, Pamplona 1999 and 2003.

both in his/her act of being, which is free, and in his/her essence, which is capable of experiences. In this way, just as classical philosophy identified a series of transcendental properties of being, the act of being person would have its own transcendental properties: freedom, intelligence and love. Particular relevance is given to the development of transcendental freedom, and it seems necessary that theoretical formulations like this, although not widely known but that consolidate personalist discoveries, should continue to forge ahead. Nevertheless, although Polo emphasises personal open-mindedness and the importance of duality, he does not include relationship in the constitution of the person, nor does he develop difference at the transcendental level.

b) The need for a philosophy of the “ dyad ”

Having identified the change at the ontological level and after including relational openness in the description of the person, the definition of a difference that does not damage equality requires a further extension of the concept of person that would account for the spousal structure. Having established the level of personal unity, we still need to define an ontology that would explain unity by including difference at the same transcendental level, a difference of a relational kind. The ontology specific to the “ unity of the two ” requires a philosophy of the “ dyad ” with which we could arrive at the final layer of the structure of the person in order to be able to establish the male identity as different to the female identity, as two distinct persons. This could be the ontological level specific to an anthropology that would not remain unconnected to the difference by sex that represents the whole of humanity.

c) Consolidation of the “ triadic ” relationships

However, we cannot completely understand the human being from the duality viewpoint because the human being is open to the three and

therefore requires development of the triadic relationships, necessary in order to think of family and the family structure of the person, and to think again of difference in God.

Until now, the Hegelian attempt, founded on the principle of non-contradiction, has been a failed endeavour where theoretically difference becomes nihilist and apophatic or belligerent and has bitter consequences if applied to social praxis, as can be seen in the Marxist influence on some feminist movements. There still remain to be explored other new avenues like that of analytical philosophy and those used in communications systems, and to re-examine the triadic structures found in the world. This is a task that remains to be done by anthropology.

4. MARY AND JOSEPH, THE SECOND CREATION

I would not like to conclude without saying something about the relation between sexed identity and Christology. The Son of God, the only Mediator and Saviour of all humankind, assumed humanity. As it has the dyadic structure of persons, with its consequent “modalisation” of nature, his divine person assumes a masculine humanity. How can the complete spousal structure be explained from Jesus?

If we set out from the principle that what is assumed is redeemed, we cannot forget that Christ assumed his humanity in the womb of a woman. Christ has a virgin mother and in her he assumes motherhood, and he also has a virgin father and in him he assumes human fatherhood. The Incarnation, therefore, is fulfilled within a family where a man and woman bring “to realization in full ‘freedom’ the ‘spousal gift of self’ in receiving and expressing such a love”,⁹¹ the fruit of which is none less than the Son of God. Joseph and Mary, virgin father and

⁹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, no. 7.

mother, are assumed by their Son with regard to the Redemption, as explained by Paul VI: “We see that at the beginning of the New Testament, as at the beginning of the Old, there is a married couple. But whereas Adam and Eve were the source of evil which was unleashed on the world, Joseph and Mary are the summit from which holiness spreads all over the earth. The Saviour began the work of salvation by this virginal and holy union, wherein is manifested his all-powerful will to purify and sanctify the family – that sanctuary of love and cradle of life”.⁹²

Joseph and Mary are part of the new creation that fulfils the plenitude of the masculine and feminine identities in reciprocation. The Son of God assumes the human dyad in order to relocate it by starting out from the Three. He himself places his relationships in the logic of sincere commitment, where each one is at the service of the other and both of them in the service of the common mission. He does so in a special way because fatherhood is concealed behind motherhood, as if to visibly remedy the divine prophecy in *Genesis* 3: “He shall rule over you”. In Mary and Joseph it is as if God were starting all over again in order to give humanity another chance. In them, redeemed in a special way, we can see a new version of Adam and Eve, their Son being the new Adam in another sense, as Redeemer. The family of Nazareth become a very special *imago* of the family of the Trinity, as one of the persons, the Son, forms part of the two images.

⁹² PAUL VI, Discourse to the *Equipos Notre-Dame* movement, 4 May 1970, cited in: JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, no. 7. Studies on Mary and Joseph are bringing to light another typology of Adam and Eve, also of patristic origin, constituted by Mary and Joseph who fulfil the new Eve and the new Adam (cf. J. FERRER ARELLANO, “La Hija de Sión”, in: *Actas del Congreso Mariológico de Barcelona*, 2007).

Woman and man: created one for the other

GIULIA PAOLA DI NICOLA and ATTILIO DANESE*

1. MALE AND FEMALE UNI-DUALITY

Every human being is a *unicum* who is gifted with specific resources, talents and limitations that make up his/her DNA, not only in the genetic sense, but also in the psychological, intellectual and spiritual senses. Maturity means being aware of these resources and using them, and that means that we direct our behaviour by taking into account the qualities at our disposal and by using them to the best of our ability. Sexual difference is among these basic qualities that form a person right from the early weeks of life as male or as female.¹

Each one of us gives mature and personal meaning to our existence, not so much in obedience to parents, to a boss, to instructions at school or from the state, nor even to self-imposition through an effort of coercive will on our own body and on our own mind, but by creatively following and developing certain objectives, in accordance with the natural qualities each one possesses. This is related to the universal “lay” meaning of vocation: the man/woman difference is at the core of anthropology, described as uni-dual, that is, at the same time and without contradiction intrinsically plural and unitary.

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¹ This text is taken from the following studies: G.P. DI NICOLA, *Uguaglianza e differenza la reciprocità uomo-donna*, Roma 1988; IDEM, *Il linguaggio della madre*, Roma 1994; A. DANESE – G.P. DI NICOLA, *Il papa scrive. Le donne rispondono*, Bologna 1996; IDEM, *Lei & Lui. Comunicazione e reciprocità*, Torino 2001.

Partiality and relationship are unavoidable experiences for everyone. The human being is made to be surpassed, Nietzsche claimed, in some way sensing that a person's limitations can be seen as a resource, because they make self mastery ontologically possible, both in interpersonal relations and in a vertical relationship with God. Willingness to serenely accept one's own reality and "work on it" to optimum ends constitutes the fundamental difference between personalism of Christian inspiration and existentialism, and also between community personalism and those false kinds of personalism that claim that the fulness of existence is self assertion and standing up for one's rights, but that downplay the importance of obligations.

One cannot be an end in oneself, nor can we place it in another person, and even less in created things. We are defined by the dialogue, explicitly or implicitly, that we are called to establish with our Creator. In this light, we should read the Bible verse: "in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (*Gen* 1: 27). It refers to a Christianity of the "beginning" that must go to the sources for a better anthropological understanding of man and woman in the relationship that refers them, each one and both together, to the Creator, rather than one to the other.² The other, the woman for the man and the man for the woman, even though "flesh from flesh" and "bone from bone", cannot be the other half of the apple, without which the first half is incomplete. The other is not a means to find one's own completeness. Nor can it be confused with that basic ontological nostalgia for unity, satisfied by God alone. Yet there remains the *you* that is necessary for recognition, in whose presence the *I* awakens and rejoices, that

² For more on these aspects see P. VANZAN, Introduction to G.P. DI NICOLA, *Uguaglianza e differenza*, op. cit.; IDEM, "Genere letterario e linee biblico-teologiche della 'Mulieris Dignitatem' di Giovanni Paolo II", in: VARIOUS AUTHORS, *Donna: genio e missione*, Milano 1990, 59-94; IDEM – A. AULETTA, *L'essere e l'agire della donna in Giovanni Paolo II*, Roma 1996.

makes the basic experience of communication and self-giving possible, in the integrality of the psyche and the body, and that moreover gives concreteness and visibility to the experience of God.

The ideal relationship between the sexes, sketched in this bible verse, is barely fulfilled in history, and only sporadically and unclearly. The anguish of reality reflects that of thought, which makes it hard to describe the man-woman difference without running into the trap of equality and absolutised difference. The tendency is more towards reducing the original uni-duality to the *ad unum*.³ The anthropological category of ‘man’ takes in all the differences, with the inevitable concealment of woman.⁴ Plurality is arrived at through reason from among general and synthetic categories, difference is organised hierarchically, status and role prevail over communication, definitions over reciprocity, synthesis over relationships, abstraction over the richness of the real.

If there were no reference to the Creator, then difference would be no more than to differentiate something from the universal model, and femininity would then be described in the negative, completely made to the measure of man (who defines her as a mirror image in relation to himself: Eve in function of Adam, as in Rousseau’s Sophie in function of Emile).⁵ In this way, the whole human dimension of history and society would be concealed, including the original otherness and equality of woman and man. In particular, woman would appear as the “image” of man.

Today, in Catholic thought, theistic monism is increasingly being substituted by a Trinitarian anthropo-theology. This prevents the sepa-

³ Cf. A. DANESE, “Riferimenti teorici dell’unidualità antropologica”, in: *Intams Review*, 2 (1996), 174-186 and our “Unidualità antropologica e coniugalità”, in: *Intams Review*, 1 (1998), 7-19.

⁴ The Hegelian dialectic process, with its denial and preservation (*aufheben*), is an example of a process that dissolves duality, and therefore the originality of difference, in the idea.

⁵ J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Emile, or On Education*, New York 1979, book 5.

ration of the anthropological and the theological planes where plurality is attributed to the former and undividable unity to the latter, because, in this case, multiplicity would only be tolerated as an imperfection in created reality. Only a Trinitarian anthropology can give a foundation to the uni-duality of persons in the image of one God, communitarian and not solitary, who speaks of Himself as Love (*circumincession*). Indeed, the importance of a you-other for the I is in direct correlation with the Revelation of God, unity of three Persons in communion with each other, that gives light to the man-woman relationship as a relationship between equals and different. The differences are intrinsically related: each one can be fully themselves if they allow themselves to be in the dynamic relationship that constitutes the I and the you in reciprocal otherness.

Reciprocity, against the backdrop of Trinitarian theology, appears as an incentive that asks for quality in relationships towards optimum models. It opens out in a history that needs conversion and rebirth from its male-dominated past, as well as from its more embittered feminist reactions.⁶

⁶ Ricoeur wrote: “The dialogic structure that presides, at all levels where thought can reach, over relations between one and the multiple [...] is the same dialogic structure, the same communicative energy that can be seen at different levels [...] at theological level in Trinitarian doctrine, through which Christianity is distinguished from simple monotheism, distinguishing in God a corporate aspect, that is, both a *kenosis* in the second person and a recapitulation of love in the third person. The same dialectic between one and the multiple is repeated analogously at the anthropological level, where the person seems to constitute the two-way force of slipping into individualistic fragmentation and totalitarian fusion; an analogous revival of the Trinitarian logic takes shape through a rhythmic relationship from assumption of responsibility, cancelling each other out with respect to the otherness of the other and the search for a community that is a person of persons; it is the same dialectic rhythm that is discovered at the sociological level, to the measure in which political engagement, by means of social struggles, seems to be the search for a balance never achieved between the demands of private life, the inevitable constrictions in building a more just society and utopian community, an analogue far from the Holy Spirit in the economy of God one and three” (P. RICOEUR, Preface to A. DANESE, *Unità e pluralità, Mounier e il ritorno alla persona*, Roma 1984, 14).

2. SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS DIFFERENCE

Contemporary culture brings into question the identity of gender. There are those who think that sexual difference has no objective value and they are spreading the conviction that individuals can establish their own identity as they like and then declare it to the public administration. They say that sexual orientation is a variable dependent on subjective taste, context and needs.

By skimming over the terms sexuality, gender and sexual orientation, and by claiming that sexual identity is an option, they are promoting the principle of “gender-neutral education” for children. In other words, they deny the existence of the two genders according to their natural connotation, as if the body and nature did not condition our way of being persons in any way. Once upon a time – a time for which we feel no nostalgia at all – to a given physical conformation there corresponded precise rigid models of behaviour for men and women, reinforced by the local environment. The male model aspired to strength, authority and rationality and the female tended towards emotions, obedience and intuition. The overcoming of these rigid stereotypes, that today are giving way in view of the changing male profile and the active participation of women, is generating a pendular counter-reaction: denial of difference, claims of absolute independence from nature and the freedom to choose between equivalent identities. So we find ourselves in the midst of the age-old juxtaposing of naturalism and culturalism.

In view of all the conjectures around this theme, we must take into serious consideration the results of studies in various human sciences that delve into the processes of the acceptance of sexuality, largely dependent on the experiences of early childhood and the quality of the relationship that the child observes the parents have with each other. All human beings who come into the world, as they develop their own identity, take in the models transmitted through education, adopt behaviour and values acquired from the different environments with which they come into con-

tact, and try to conform to their own ideals and aspirations, but they cannot do this without starting out from and through coming to grips with – or if so desired, an interpretation of – their own body with all its morphogenic, hormonal and physiological specificity.

On the one hand, an anthropology that respects the person dissociates itself from deterministic and biological positions, according to which roles and relationships between the sexes are fixed in a static model determined by nature. On the other hand, however, human beings, not being idealistically culture alone, cannot construct their history if not in dialectic confrontation with nature and with all their conditioning. We should ask about the possible consequences of violence against nature before dismissing the idea of “tradition” as “traditionalist”, and ask if violated nature will take vengeance and use violence on us in return, as the ancients well understood: “*Natura non facit saltus*” (Linnaeus) and “*Natura enim non nisi parendo vincitur*” (Bacon).

Confusion of identity is a risk especially during the period of adolescence which, as we know, is a vivacious but fragile time in life. It is not always so simple to recognise oneself physiologically as female or male. Can we conclude from this that problems of identity are resolved by encouraging the free choice of one’s own sexual orientation? A girl could wish to hide her femininity and forget (how can she possibly?) her menstruation, breasts and the maternal orientation of her whole body and opt for the male model which seems to be better. Likewise, there are boys who associate masculinity with aggressiveness, competitiveness and public obligations, and they can develop a refusal to belong to their own sex. It might even seem appealing to anyone, hypothetically and even at certain periods in life, to dream of assuming an identity different from one’s own.

A flood of questions come together. Could there be a risk of going from respect for minorities to extolling them, and even to go as far as ghettoising the majority? How can we exchange the exception with the norm and take for granted that there exist five possible sexual orientations, all equivalent? Can we still freely discuss these topics, or will the

war on homophobia mean that it will even be forbidden to speak about natural sexual difference? The ideologies that try to break up natural differences, do they not contradict decades of Women's Studies that were centred on awareness of original difference? Why do we refer to the ecology of the environment only when it is a question of nature that needs to be protected, of species in extinction and of pollution, while we become champions of an abstract freedom when it is about our bodies? Why is there a severe penalty for injuring or mutilating a dog and yet there is no support for the "self-harmony" that each person should have with their own body? Why do we defend the principle of biodiversity for nature while for the human being indifference towards difference is considered to be an achievement?

In reality, the advocates of unisex, transex and homosex, by damaging the innate and original difference of nature, attack the core of relational anthropology: the innate male-female identity that is found in all accounts of our origins, including in the Bible. By fomenting free choice, they attack heterosexuality, which allows for the well-being of people with their body, marriage and procreation. The natural family consequently appears to be an option that depends on people being inclined towards "traditional" life customs with respect to forms of modern and "open" ways of cohabitation.

We do not think it misplaced that the Catholic magisterium should call the alarm about the risk of confusion and boomerang effects that these theories can provoke. The advice from the "Van Thuan Observatory" goes for everyone: "We go too far if we separate sex from gender, claiming that the former is a physiological fact and the latter is a cultural and historical fact. It is true that sexual difference is also managed and lived in different ways in culture and history, but it is not right to separate gender from sex, because sex is a fundamental anthropological fact for a person".⁷

⁷ "Unicef's three silences", in: *Van Thuan Observatory Newsletter* no. 67, Verona, 15 March 2007 (www.vanthuanobservatory.org).

3. MALE AND FEMALE – IDEAL AND REALITY

An analysis of the hazards of the cultures that made up the history of the twentieth century, like that of the different stages in feminism, confirms our suspicions that we are not equipped to understand the anthropological complexity of being men and women. This awareness must not lead to a state of aphasia, but it should stimulate us to identify some of the characteristic traits of the two genders, while reserving for the person standing in front of us the right to say his/her own word, free of pre-conceived notions and fragmented ideologies.

We shall now present what we regard as the principle traits of the feminine and of the masculine (very briefly in order to keep this lecture within the time limit), both in their positive significance and in their possible corruption.⁸

3.1.a. *The relationality* of the human being is more clearly manifest in a woman's body. The female procreative process contains – as inscribed in nature – paradigmatic meanings of the relationality of the person as such. Motherhood in particular exalts this anthropological dimension, through the pattern of unique relationship, two in one, that is established between mother and fetus. The maternal physiological factor is an invitation to restrain selfishness, individualism, the making of unfulfilled promises and the delusion of the omnipotence of the I. Women can have greater or less maternal sense: they often give their lives for their children, but sometimes they abandon them in dustbins. If we go beyond the natural confines, maternity seems indicative of the capacity of a person to make space, to welcome another person, to dedicate oneself to that person and then to gradually allow that person to live his/her own autonomy and to facilitate his/her detachment from oneself.

⁸ For a more in-depth study, see A. DANESE – G.P. DI NICOLA, *Lei & Lui. Comunicazione e reciprocità*, op. cit.

The corruption of this trait is in the tendency to take possession of others, to capture them in your own embrace and engulf them.

3.1.b. *Assertiveness*. This refers to the tendency to make visible and make use of one's own potentialities. It is also clear with this trait that it is not automatically attributable to all men, given that low self-esteem is a problem that grips both men and women. Nevertheless, in an attempt to identify an equivalent to women's relationality, we feel that a tendency to self-affirmation is more evident in the male. It is not at all a negative egoistic tendency. Self-esteem, trust in one's own potential and the ability to use it are effective conditions that confirm personal maturity and give depth to the relational capacity of a person, perfectly integrating the feminine relationality. We cannot love the other if we do not love ourselves: *Caritas bene ordinata incipit a se ipso*. Assertiveness is wonderful support for relationships with one's wife and children because it offers a sense of protection and security.

Corruptions of this aspect, pushed to excess, are arrogance, selfishness, narcissism, and a tendency to underestimate and exploit the other for one's own ends.

3.2.a. *A more pronounced awareness of limitations* reflects the experience of women, as they are particularly conditioned by their harmony with nature. This binds them to physiological phenomena, but it also prevents them from flying too high like Icarus, and then having disastrous falls. They must be fast in accepting the unexpected (changes in the cycle, unexpected pregnancies) and consequently, have a greater awareness of not being able to master their own bodies and pilot their own lives. Awareness of limitations also implies awareness of breaking all systems of thought, of all human constructs in face of death and therefore of human dependence, which is substantial.

The corruption of this feature is in the tendency to sit back and accept things without trying to overcome them, to delegate one's social

responsibilities to others and enclose oneself in the small world of the home, to refuse to face reality. Indeed, a certain passivity has been typical of a large proportion of the female population throughout history.

3.2.b. *The struggle against limits*, a typically male characteristic, urges one forward to explore the unknown, to battle against obstacles, and to be confident of being able to do so. Part of the image of the male is the model of a determined fighter facing the opposition, ready to go to war to defend the territory and his loved ones. He feels he should face the challenges of life, and not retreat when facing the opposition presented by nature, others and events, and to do everything possible to succeed even in adverse circumstances.

Conflict in itself is not a negative characteristic. It also has the strength and the stubbornness to overcome evil and conquer new frontiers in life. Mounier used the word *affrontement* to depict the active engagement with which human beings dedicate themselves to a cause, even at the cost of sacrifice and loss of blood, and he recommended to women too to have this courageous and combative attitude.

The corruption of this characteristic is in the tendency to modulate relationships on the register of competition, with all that derives from that, like bitter contest, envy, and the use of illegitimate means to achieve the desired objectives.

3.3.a. *Caring for life*. Caring for life is connected to motherhood. This can be seen in various ways like in the aptitude for feeding others, beginning with feeding babies, for protecting, even to the detriment of her own person, for healing wounds and alleviating the suffering of the sick, right up to being with their dear ones as they approach death in the terminal phase of illness.

Care-giving characterises both women and responsible men, but it is universally accepted that a disposition to be close to the weakest is felt more by women, even urging them forward to heroic actions in an

almost natural way. There is a testimony to this fact in the famous episode about Solomon. It shows the king's intuition regarding a mother's logic when settling an argument between two women. Each of them claimed the child that was born alive and contended that the dead child belonged to the other woman. He suggested they divide the child in two, because he knew that the real mother would prefer to be estranged from her child, to be accused of perjury, to receive social and penal condemnation, rather than for her child to die (*1 Kings* 3: 16-27).

The weak side of this characteristic is an obsession towards the other that can cancel one's own dignity, in servile and material care for the needs of others without taking into account one's own vocation, in loving too much and badly, in unwise prodigality, and in the end in dissatisfaction and coercion.

3.3.b. *Vital dynamism*. Perhaps the tendency is more notable in the male to face conflict (with others and nature) in a dynamic way, tearing up and rearranging papers, enjoying adventure and being curious to find out about everything. This is connected to the little weight that nature attributes to them in relation to life. The presence of the father in the family, who is there as a person who is trusted and loved in the symbiosis mother-child, represents the call to place oneself at the service of life and its fragility, the privileged channel of communication with the outside, bringing within the dyad whatever was found outside and bringing outside the human warmth of the vital core of the family. He finds himself in the situation of facilitating the life of the family by supporting the needs and providing unexpected openings, promoting unknown paths, trusting in chance, intuition or Providence.

In a more general sense, this attitude, reawakened by the difference of the feminine, puts the resource of initiative into motion. Heidegger outlined this characteristic by taking from Sophocles who wrote in *Antigone*: "Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than

man”,⁹ which he translated as “many are the forms of strangeness, yet nothing can surpass the towering strangeness of human beings”. “Strangeness” (das Unheimlichste) thus substitutes “wonders”, in order to more properly describe the enjoyment of questioning, conquering, discovering.

Human beings, particularly the males, seem to be the ones that escape to the limits and cause violence to nature, yet they explore all the possibilities it contains. The two aspects, the more classical that points to the wonder and Heidegger’s version that refers to the strangeness, are attributable to Adam’s amazement on seeing Eve, like an awakening that arose in him after discovering a difference that set energies in motion that had hitherto been unexplored, and the joy of adventure begins. Wonder and strangeness are in this sense correlated.

The corruption of this characteristic is in the fragility in keeping to one’s own commitment, in the elusiveness of bonds, in the tendency to undertake individual paths even without and against doing so in union with one’s partner.

3.4.a. *Transgression and irony.* Although a certain androcentric mentality has attributed to man the characteristic of transcendence with respect to facts, in contrast with women’s greater dependence on nature (we are thinking of Kierkegaard), it is possible to see in femininity a pronounced ability to live within structures, in a flexibly adaptive attitude, and at the same time, at the opportune moment, to relativize it and go beyond it. Should affections and values be at stake that they are not willing to abandon, transgression is seen as legitimate and necessary and they find the courage to act in a way that is not in the rules, institutions and all that is organised and organisable. This kind of transgression reminds us of Hegel’s happy intuition, drawn from the interpreta-

⁹ M. HEIDEGGER, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, New Haven 2000, 156-176.

tion of Sophocle's *Antigone*, of woman as the "everlasting irony of the community".¹⁰

This is also connected to that necessary detachment from structures that allows us to live within them without allowing ourselves to be crushed. This also helps to understand the different relationship of women with faith, in which they are less oriented towards the rules and institutions and more attentive to a spiritual, affective and mystical relationship with God. Within the eschatological scene, owing to an ability to live within and outside institutional structures, to be in the visible Church with one's soul turned to the invisible, it is easier to understand the fulfilment of the royal priesthood of men and women in God and the crowning of truth in charity ("the greatest of these is love").¹¹

The corruption of this characteristic is in the inability to calculate with objectivity and so to have the tendency to circumvent institutions and to get round them for partial ends. The feeling of legality is weakened and they try to bend the common good to familistic ends, thus weakening the universal and impersonal value of fair justice, which necessarily goes through institutional channels.

3.4.b. *Normativeness*, or holding to the rules, both in the sense of producing new ones to guide behaviour and evaluating them within frames of coherence and rationality, and in the sense of keeping them as a seal and regalia of social ties. This trait, which is typical of judges, is confirmed in a study by Gilligan, which proved that the female identity is mostly directed towards being with others (*mitsein*), and the male identity towards the organisation of relationships according to an ethic that is more attentive to normative morality.

¹⁰ Cf. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford-New York 1977, 288; for more about *Antigone* see: G.P. DI NICOLA, *Nostalgia di Antigone*, Teramo 1998.

¹¹ 1 Cor 13: 13; see also JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

This trait cannot be superficially considered to be a kind of pedantic fixation. On the contrary, it involves the ability to go beyond the subjective perspective in the tension to establish the equidistance that is the source of distributive justice. Paul Ricoeur regarded attention to the construction of just institutions to be an essential condition of the ethical triad (self-esteem, concern for others and just institutions).¹²

It is only through objective rules that go beyond individual attachments that it is possible to rise above the ties of blood, the search for loopholes and use of cunning to find solutions to existential and family problems. In this way impartiality can be reached that in one way prevents the domination of the strong and intelligent, and on the other it imitates the behaviour of a God who distributes to everyone the fruits of his love: “that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. [...] So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (*Mt* 5: 45,48).

The corruption of this trait is in bureaucratic behaviour, in the impersonality of behaviour that is coldly objective, effective for achieving ends, but penalises those who do not enter into the established norms and who feel oppressed by them. The Gospel rule can be a reference here: “Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” (*Mk* 2: 27), “for the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath” (*Mt* 12: 8).

3.5.a. *The positive face of pain.* We regard a man’s physical suffering as the start of decline and a warning of death, but for a woman in childbirth there is a special sign of physical suffering that is closely joined to procreation and therefore to the positive dimension of life. In a woman’s body the other face of the negative is imprinted, witness to the indissoluble link between pain and love, suffering and joy,

¹² See P. RICOEUR, *Persona, comunità, istituzioni* (ed. A. DANESE), Firenze 1994.

death and resurrection. Reflection on the positive side of this difference can be particularly important for girls, because it predisposes them to accept – and not to endure – the rhythm of the body which is not always easy.

The corruption of this trait is a resignation that does not stand up to pain, a kind of self-pity that extols one's own sacrifice and indecorously emphasises its external manifestations, and puts oneself at the centre of the attention of others.

3.5.b. *Facing up to the risk of death.* Generally speaking, men are mostly attached to a more aggressive idealism. This tendency has been attested to for centuries in hero figures, and it spurs them on to spill blood and to give their lives in total self-giving to a cause that they retain deserves it. In Hegel, the capacity to face death marks the distance between the master and the servant by the fact that the servant trusts in the protection of the other and in exchange offers his dependence and services. It is a dialectic that is applied to the analysis of the emergence of social classes, and also in the man-woman relationship through the dynamics of subjection and oppression that is generated when the man, who faces risk outside the home, acquires through this means dominion over the woman. Hegel himself, though, points out how this dialectic is overturned by the fact that the master depends on the services of his servant, in a sort of reciprocal interdependence.

The corruption of this trait consists in irresponsible impetuosity, in arrogance (we think of the games of adolescents, like driving too fast or with eyes closed...), in treating danger with scorn and not estimating the ratio between what they are risking – their lives, and what that would mean for their family – and the objective they wish to reach.

4. LEARNED IGNORANCE

The characteristics that we have mentioned refer to a personalist and communitarian anthropology, given that these are traits that cannot be automatically applied to all men and all women, precisely in order to respect the person as such. The ways can be very different, but by learning to listen to the silent language of the body, which is the language of love, men and women can both discover an implicit call to give their lives. Although the difference is evident at the physical level and in its phenomenological implications, the two are united in the same call to give their blood (childbirth, work, war...), to live out their “being for” as a gift, in imitation of the Trinitarian life of God. By keeping alive their relationship in vibrant reciprocity, each one learns from the other and the characteristics of each one acquire their genuine relational significance. It would not be possible to fix once and for all and for each one, the characteristics mentioned as if they were obligatory tracks in the existential journey. The elements are missing that could irrefutably qualify the difference. In this area there is great difficulty finding research that is not ideologically oriented.

Also on the Catholic front there are some attempts underway, but the problems have not been resolved. The Bible story, after all, is full of mystery regarding the three terms of the relationships presented. They know that male and female are “in the image of God”, but we cannot know the ultimate term of the analogy: God. This referral suggests rather the inopportuneness of making a definition, because of the fact that the three terms of the analogy evade the ideas “clear and distinct”. They must be continuously confronted with a double requirement: the need to hold firm in some way to the original difference, indispensable for reciprocity, and the impossibility of reaching sure conclusions about the contents of this difference, fixing it once and for all without falling into the risk of being proved wrong by history (how many definitions of woman have become incompatible with reality!). Besides, Adam and

Eve cannot know each other well enough. Eve – in the second and more metaphorical story in Genesis – cannot say who Adam really is because he came before her, and Adam does not know Eve because he was peacefully sleeping when the woman was made by God. It is God, the Creator, who presents and reveals them to each other. It is better, then, to propose some guidelines, always open to the innovation each person represents because, on the one hand, you cannot close yourself off from the world, and on the other, we must be ready to rethink the indications given in the context of the circumstances of our times, with tradition, with history and with the Word.

We must give credit to John Paul II for having opened up the discourse on difference and for having put it at the centre of the anthropological question, with respect to a tradition that had taken for granted the definition of femininity and also with respect to feminism which radically contested it. His reassessment of sexuality, of the body and of women is still a key reference for the Catholic magisterium (Catecheses on human love, *Familiaris Consortio*, *Mulieris Dignitatem* – that are milestones in magisterial reference – and the Letter to Women). In particular *Mulieris Dignitatem* has represented a cultural revolution, later followed up by the Letter to Women, which recognised the value of the social and political activity of women, an aspect not very present in *Mulieris Dignitatem*.¹³

The tone set by the Pope in dealing with this question has its validity in the awareness of the need to avoid the traps of biologism and of indifference. The philosophical training of John Paul II allowed for full recognition of the importance of the body that conditions the way of being of men and women, although it does not determine it. Phenomenology had clarified that awareness of self, the world and others is always mediated by a corporeal perception and therefore men and

¹³ For these topics see: G.P. DI NICOLA – A. DANESE, *Il papa scrive. Le donne rispondono*, op. cit.

women cast different perspectives on the world. On the other hand, in order to avoid falling into biological or genetic determinism, we must recognise that a person does not live in the body as a prisoner, but must interact with it, to have an understanding of it that is compatible with his/her own ideals, and in some way to transcend it in a dialectic that is at the same time conditioned and creative. It is not easy to identify the right distance between overvaluing the body (biologism) and, on the contrary, undervaluing it (spiritualism). John Paul II centred his attention on an indisputable fact: a woman's body appears to be structured in a way to be able to generate life and therefore she cannot perceive herself without taking this fact into consideration. It is an intimate part of her identity, independent of any actual fulfilment of conception during her life. However, as it would be unjust towards the men to claim that only women can have maternal and unsparing love, *Mulieris Dignitatem* gives interpretations of the female body in a symbolic and personalist sense. By presenting the paradigms of spouse, mother and virgin, it clarifies that it is not a case of determinism in nature but of symbolic dimensions of the human, as such, linked to the person, male and female. The tone of *Mulieris Dignitatem* is twofold. On the one hand, corporeal data is decisive in outlining the identity and role of women, and for this reason it is to them that the figure of mother, spouse and virgin corresponds. On the other hand, we must note that all human beings are spouses, mothers and virgins, in the ethical and anthropo-theological meaning that these figures have in relation to love, caring, and the integrity of the person before God.

This twofold track is found in the innovative commentary made on Ephesians 5, the Pauline letter that presents the nuptial relationship Christ-Church as paradigmatic of the husband-wife relationship. On the one hand it assumes this analogy, and on the other the Pope invites us to read the recommendations of Saint Paul in the light of *Eph 5: 21*. Saint Paul says: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ". The Pope adds: "the awareness that in marriage there is

mutual 'subjection of the spouses out of reverence for Christ', and not just that of the wife to the husband, must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behaviour and customs".¹⁴

From this twofold register some problems arise that are still being discussed. These include: men and women recognise themselves in the bride in the symbolic and ethical sense, while in the bridegroom only the men do; if the submission of the Church to Christ has no need of explanation (the asymmetry Christ-Church, like Christ-Mary is inherent to the difference of nature), the same cannot be said of the bride and bridegroom; the matching of male-Christ with regard to loving, at first seems particularly tied to the sexual dimension.¹⁵ This axiom vacillates in an integral vision of the man-woman relationship, if only because the first experience that each human person has on entering the world is that of being loved by a mother. Many studies emphasise that the mother loves first, long before the child has the possibility of responding by smiling and calling her by name.¹⁶

The vocation of women from this standpoint seems to be particularly representative of the universal call to love, as John Paul II recognised when he asked fathers to somehow learn about fatherhood from the mother: "It is therefore necessary that the man be fully aware that [...] he owes a special debt to the woman. No programme of 'equal

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 24.

¹⁵ "When the author of the Letter to the Ephesians calls Christ 'the Bridegroom' and the Church 'the Bride', he indirectly confirms through this analogy the truth about woman as bride. The Bridegroom is the one who loves. The Bride is loved: it is she who receives love, in order to love in return. [...] When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman [...] But in the context of the biblical analogy and the text's interior logic, it is precisely the woman – the bride – who manifests this truth to everyone" (*ibid.*, no. 29).

¹⁶ From among the studies on this theme I take the liberty of referring to mine: G.P. DI NICOLA, *Il linguaggio della madre. Aspetti sociologici e antropologici*, op. cit.

rights' between women and men is valid unless it takes this fact fully into account. [...] The man – even with all his sharing in parenthood – always remains 'outside' the process of pregnancy and the baby's birth; in many ways he has to learn his own 'fatherhood' from the mother".¹⁷

Mulieris Dignitatem takes us to recognition of asymmetry in the heart of reciprocity, to the advantage of the mother, asymmetry confirmed by the presentation of femininity as the archetype of all humanity. In fact, according to *Mulieris Dignitatem*: "The Bible convinces us of the fact that one can have no adequate hermeneutic of man, or of what is 'human', without appropriate reference to what is 'feminine'".¹⁸ And again: "From this point of view, the 'woman' is the representative and the archetype of the whole human race: she represents the humanity which belongs to all human beings, both men and women".¹⁹

The great perspectives of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, that we are celebrating here, certainly cannot give the last word on the mystery of man and woman in the image of God. Precisely because of the extent of the problems and the risks connected with them, John Paul II encouraged us to continue the task of drawing up a uni-dual anthropology, in which male and female are a concrete expression of the communion structure of the person.²⁰ It is urgent to develop "a more penetrating and accurate consideration of the anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity with the intent of clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man, that is, a diversity yet mutual complementarity, not only as it concerns roles to be held and

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

²⁰ Cfr. www.chiesacattolica.it/cc_i_new/documenti_cei/2007-01/29-36/Relazione_Farina.doc.

functions to be performed, but also, and more deeply, as it concerns her make-up and meaning as a person”.²¹ This is what the then-Cardinal Ratzinger did in his Letter to Bishops that was centred not so much on women as on the man-woman relationship,²² and that is what we are doing at this conference.

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 50.

²² 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*. Benedict XVI returned to the question in the Message for the World Day of Peace in 2007: “At the origin of many tensions that threaten peace are surely the many unjust inequalities still tragically present in our world. Particularly insidious among these are, on the one hand, inequality in access to essential goods like food, water, shelter, health; on the other hand, there are persistent inequalities between men and women in the exercise of basic human rights. [...] Similarly, inadequate consideration for the condition of women helps to create instability in the fabric of society. I think of the exploitation of women who are treated as objects, and of the many ways that a lack of respect is shown for their dignity; I also think – in a different context – of the mindset persisting in some cultures, where women are still firmly subordinated to the arbitrary decisions of men, with grave consequences for their personal dignity and for the exercise of their fundamental freedoms. There can be no illusion of a secure peace until these forms of discrimination are also overcome, since they injure the personal dignity impressed by the Creator upon every human being” (BENEDICT XVI, *The Human Person, the Heart of Peace*, nos. 6-7).

Women's responsibility and participation in building up the Church and society

PAOLA BIGNARDI*

My contribution will not be so much a study as an opportunity to share stories drawn from my years of contact with women whose lives have mostly been tales of suffering, exclusion and violence. However, these people also desired to break free and to find dignity.

So, this will be an account of real experiences that can help us to reflect on the responsibility of women towards the Church and towards society.

THE FEMININE GENIUS

If we had to summarise in a phrase the essential direction my talk will take, I would express it as women's responsibility in the Church and in society at this point in a journey of emancipation that has had significant results, and to retain the originality of the feminine genius in a vibrant and intense relationship of teamwork with men. Women's journey, as John Paul II said in the *Letter to Women*, has been rich and positive, although not free of mistakes, and today it is faced with a certain risk: that the participation of women in the life of the Church and society should be viewed according to a logic of standardisation with men. In this way women lose the most original aspect of their identity and deny the Church and society a contribution that is more necessary than ever today.

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That is why I would like to devote the first part of my talk to the theme of the “feminine genius”, an expression used by John Paul II in *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988). One could take this to be an expression that arose from rhetorical circumstance, but when it was subsequently repeated and encouraged, we began to realise that it was a new and important category. It was presented in order to interpret the vocation and mission of women today according to the Gospel.

The expression “genius” in everyday language implies a power of understanding and intelligence that is above the norm.

Genius implies extraordinary capacity that is above that of others, a gift that is for everyone. If it is used, it is to everyone’s advantage.

Genius is intuition, it is the ability to see far ahead, to know intuitively what is beyond. It allows us to go over and above rationality and logic.

A genius is a person with eyes that see even that which cannot be seen or is not yet visible; one who can see with the eyes of the heart, because all that is most essential is invisible to the eyes in the head; one who can believe the reasons of the heart and knows how to trust them: the ineffable, empathy, contemplation.

This brilliance does not belong to the wise of the world, but rather to the small, the simple, the children. It belongs to women because their vocation passes in a special way through love.

The feminine genius of which John Paul II spoke is in the order of love. Women receive love in order to love in their turn: “woman can only find herself by giving love to others”.¹ It is in the order of love that a woman’s dignity is measured.

A woman’s practice of her vocation has special value in our times. Breakthroughs in science and technology have brought about a higher standard of living for some, but it has excluded many others.² *Mulieris*

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

² Cf. *ibid.*

Dignitatem reminds us that “unilateral progress can also lead to a gradual loss of sensitivity for man, that is, for what is essentially human. In this sense, our times in particular await the manifestation of that ‘genius’ which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human!”³

Compared with the dominant way of thinking in a society of efficiency, possessing and searching for well-being, a woman’s charism is that of the little ones in the Gospel. If women live out their vocation to the full, they should witness to the primacy of the person, the value of interpersonal relations lived out in gratuitousness, and the importance of being over having, appearing and doing. To live out her femininity means for a woman to agree to give witness to these values that are great but not triumphant. Otherwise, the temptation to look for equality with men is there, which in the end means assuming ways and styles of male behaviour.

It is precisely in the evangelical weakness of the values contained in the feminine charism that there is a prophecy for all, so that a civilisation of love may be built.

The experience of giving birth, inscribed in the body and soul of women, gives to life-giving love that characteristic feature that shapes thought, relationships, attitudes, and relations with reality. Motherhood is love that gives itself, being at the same time fruitful suffering. Motherhood is to see written in your child’s face features of your own face and yet allow the child to be him/herself, born for freedom. It is to be witnesses of a life starting out, one of the experiences of the invisible, yet nevertheless real.

Contained in the meaning of motherhood there is an invitation to overcome individualism and all temptations to seek omnipotence that are connected to our culture. There is the hope of compensating for the death we find in life by accepting the suffering that people face day

³ *Ibid.*

after day throughout their lives, in their mysterious and positive purpose.

Motherhood can be “the highest symbol that nature gives us to interpret so that we can understand the meaning of our relationships with others. Women themselves, and men even more, can learn, by seeing it inscribed in a woman’s body, that a person is herself if she gives herself, if she loves someone knowing that this is to suffer, if she can stand back in order to make space, if her relationships with others are in that attitude of motherhood that is fruitful with new inter-subjective realities”.⁴

This explains why Pope John Paul II says that a woman’s vocation is a particular responsibility for humanity: “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”.⁵

I think that the experience of giving birth, either physically or spiritually, is almost the paradigm of a woman’s life, of her relationship with reality, with herself and with others, and can symbolically contain her whole vocation and mission for the Church and the world.

GENERATE A MATERNAL CHURCH

The relationship between women and the Church can easily be stated in descriptive terms that show the contribution that women today make to the life of the Christian community, the problems that remain, the attention to be given, the choices to be made. I think that this would be a reductive approach that would pass over the deep rela-

⁴ G.P. DI NICOLA, *Uguaglianza e differenza, la reciprocità uomo-donna*, Roma 1988, 94.

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

tionship that exists between women and the Church in terms of substance and depth.

In this sense, I think I can say that today women should be able to live their task of generating life deeply and interiorly in the Church. They should generate a maternal Church.

People of our times are often tired out from a frenetic lifestyle and they lose their most important points of reference, and they mostly ask the Church to show its motherly face. The response to the petition for hope that is often implicitly present in people's hearts comes with tremendous love. When people know that they are loved, it can be noticed that their way of being, their attitude to life, is as if they had acquired new strength, impetus, energy that comes from trust, that is generated because they know they are loved. Pope Benedict XVI said in his latest encyclical that it will not be science that will save the world, but rather a great deal of love. We could add to that statement in *Spe Salvi*: it will not be our well-being, our strategies, our diplomacy or our money that will save people and fill the void that is in the hearts of so many, especially the young, but only the certainty and experience of being loved.

Our times have a great need of love and are very sensitive to this need. People are fascinated by the power of love, much more than that of reason or that of heroism in grand gestures.

Love convinces more than any reasoning. It makes an impact, perhaps because in the aridity of soul that we experience today, we are fascinated and attracted by gestures, words, attitudes that yield a rich harvest and come from those who are not turned in on themselves. There is an extraordinary richness found in those who give themselves to others.

We are struck by the fact that Benedict XVI dedicated his first encyclical to the theme of love. God is love, and our lives too feel an attraction and are seeking, and we feel urged to come out of ourselves, to give ourselves to others, without limits, as long as this tension brings us to God.

God is love and so gives fulness to our lives, for God created us in love. The Gospels that tell us this are simply words of love. God is love, and God teaches us that this is the way to win over those who are seeking a meaning for their lives. I believe that today we need the witness of a Church that through its children loves others with mercy, goodness and meekness, and in this way testifies that God is Love.

A maternal Church expresses itself in every possible modulation of the symphony of love that gives meaning to life, that allows us to see that human existence is precious for someone/Someone. Our hearts then fill with trust in the goodness that is a force for all of existence.

The Church would be the good Samaritan who pours the balm of hope on the wounds of life. With a mother's heart the Church would come close to each person, always prepared to listen, understand, forgive, give energy for a new start, and point to the far horizons that go beyond the small-scale situations of daily life, for these could easily become the extent of our vision and we would not aim to reach out any further.

I believe that women today are called to beget this Church, to let it be humanly born from their hearts as it was born from Christ in the Holy Spirit. They can do so by bringing to the Christian community a style of listening, of giving attention to people, and of understanding and dialogue.

The Church born in this way would be a Church that is attentive to the whole person with his/her stories, difficulties and plans. Its way of communicating the faith would not be like that of a distant teacher who does no more than transmit impersonal doctrine. The Church would know how to be with those who are searching, and with proximity and example, with words and testimony, would teach people to distinguish between good and evil; to recognise the things that really count; to sustain people in a path of faith that can change their lives, and especially by helping them to see and acquire the features of an intense and profound humanity: free and without cost, strong and passionate like the

Lord Jesus showed us in the Gospel stories. Education is part of the motherhood of the Church. In this way there is no false alternative between a mother Church or teacher Church. The Church is teacher because it is mother, and teaches as a mother because a mother loves, and because of the love of a maternal heart, it cannot hold back the truth. When the Church teaches, it does so with the characteristics of a mother. A mother knows that knowledge of a truth is not enough to change someone's life and direct it towards a great desire for good.

It would be a Church capable of appreciating the value of relationships, before and during its activities and initiatives. This kind of Church would not be seen mainly as an organisation, or structure, or source of initiatives for people, but as a family, an open house for everyone, a place in which people can experience fellowship, which they in turn should witness to the world.

There is a need for Christian communities today that choose to care for relationships with cordiality and warmth, with thoughtfulness, humaneness and imagination. I can give some examples. The quality of young people's connections with the Church when they go to their parishes depends on whether they only find structures, or if they find people there who stop to talk to them, who take an interest in their lives, who are prepared to become both friends and guides. Preparation for marriage for a couple can be quite different depending on whether they find themselves in a cold and distant ambience or whether there are people there who can establish cordial relations with them, who are welcoming and warm and continue to be so beyond those circumstances, and who make them feel part of the parish family.

The Church also needs to rediscover in the ordinary course of events the meaning of the experiences that pertain to it, like contemplation and culture, and correct that tendency towards pragmatism that is being seen more and more in Christian communities. Eager activism that wants to reach out everywhere and attempts to plan everything is on the rise, and sometimes it only causes a sense of disheartening

fatigue in the faith. Women are familiar with the patience of waiting, and within themselves and even in their bodies, they have the experience of mystery. They must help the Christian community today to find other dimensions, those that help the Church to be an experience of welcoming and of waiting, of faith as an experience of listening, open to the unforeseeable action of God, and not fruit of our personal management.

The Church also needs women's original faith, because the path towards truth and the mystery of God also uses the approach that passes from the heart and through the expressions of mysticism. Is there a special feminine way of living the experience of faith? I believe there is.

Women's original way of being includes the sense of person. In the experience of faith this becomes perception, particularly vibrant and characteristic, of the relationship with the person of the Lord Jesus.

The women in the Gospels show not only the intensity of their faith, but also the understanding they have of the mystery of the Lord. Beginning with the Mother, whose image at the foot of the cross speaks not only of her sorrow at the death of her Son, but also of the fulfilment of the path of silence and waiting that began with the annunciation of the Angel. At the foot of the cross, where everything paradoxically unfolds, where truth is made manifest, and also that of the disciples' lives, Mary holds in her arms the body of her Son, the Life of the world. She, as a woman, knows what it means to give life by means of death. The other women know this too, those who remained on Calvary. During Jesus' mission, they followed the Lord with the intense simplicity of their faith. They listened to him with their hearts, and they received in their lives the signs of salvation that regenerates into new life. Because they followed him with love, they understood. They stayed with him at the foot of the cross because the personal love they had for Jesus gave them the insight to understand that the God he revealed was different from the one they imagined and expected, and they accepted this. The

disciples expected a victorious and powerful God, and they could not understand this Messiah who was far from what they had in mind. In their disillusionment, they went away. The women remained because they were faithful to their love, and also because they were able to understand that God can save the world by dying on a cross. That is how they were the first to be told about the resurrection.

The Church needs a faith that believes that “nothing is impossible for God”, that believes that the ways he used to enter into personal lives and human history are unforeseeable, remaining out there beyond us.

John Paul II recognised the value of this faith and proclaimed many women to be saints and blessed, and he recognised them to be doctors of the Church like Teresa of Avila, and also like Therese of Lisieux.

The “feminine” dimension of faith should belong to a certain extent to all believers. Women can testify to it more and help the whole Church not to lose this essential treasure. Of course the Church cannot be without women, not only for their manpower and their time, but above all for their thinking and for their hearts.

A CHURCH THAT DEMONSTRATES THE VALUE OF THE FEMININE GENIUS

The Church could continue to speak of – as it intends to do – the value of the “feminine genius” by simply accepting it and appreciating it: its resolute testimony could build a more effective language than that of documents, which are also often heard and appreciated for the openness they put forward.

The Church in the life of our communities and in its comprehensive experience, should give more attention to women, not only in cultural terms or in opinions. It should also keep the subject of the feminine condition on the agenda, including specific women with their specific experiences, be attentive to what they think, experience, suffer, and

what they ask to be in the People of God and how they want to be in it. A Church that is attentive to women is prepared and committed to respect the original way of being of women, with their original way of living the faith and of interpreting spiritual experience. The Church would be greatly impoverished if it should ask women to renounce their way of being in the community. It would be as if being a woman were a weakness to be corrected.

I think that today the question is primarily about the ordinary popular fabric of the Christian community, where the most generous and vibrant experiences take place in silence, as well as the most commonplace over-dependence and humiliation.

In order to make this jump in quality, I think that the Church should look at some questions that remain open.

1. *Women and responsibility.* A Church that is attentive to women needs a Christian community that is capable and willing to involve them in places where people think, formulate, evaluate and decide. It must accept them as they are with their sensitivities and their way of reading reality. They should never be asked to renounce their femininity! Of course no one would make explicit requests of that kind, but it can happen every time women are asked to be different, to conform to a style of relating to others and to circumstances that are not suited to them. To accept women in places of responsibility also means trusting in their way of thinking, in their evaluation of things, and in their sensitivity. It means acknowledging the value of a difference that is for teamwork and not for standardisation, and so it reappraises the presumption to standardise everything to one style of decision-making and governing.

In order that all of this should be of some value, it is necessary that it should happen at the levels of the populace in the Christian community. It should not be a case of involving some women as representatives of the others. Although the involvement of some lay people and some women as observers at the Council fifty years ago was of great symbolic

value, today that is no longer sufficient. Pastoral councils in parishes and dioceses, the various commissions and ecclesial congresses, need to have a feminine presence that is numerically significant and qualitatively relevant.

2. *Theological culture and women.* Women must be encouraged to explore areas where they have not often been present in the Church, areas like theological culture, especially in the sphere of research and enquiry into new ways of saying God today. Although there are more women today undertaking studies in theology, there are still too few of them doing research. Research could gain very much from contributions by women. Today it seems that the paths of scientific reasoning and our trust in it have been exhausted. For this reason the cultural contribution of thought that is rich in the habit of drawing from concreteness and that also knows the reasons of the heart, without renouncing the rigour of method, could give new life to research itself. It would make it more difficult to be self-referential and would bring in the provocation of ambiguity and the richness of concrete existence. Of course it is not an easy road for a woman to take. Not only must she find within herself a cultural interest in that activity, but she must also find acceptance in the places traditionally devoted to theological research and resolve the substantial problem of reconciling this activity with the need to earn a living.

3. *The question of ministries.* I was not sure whether I should include the question of ministries on this list. For some, the conferring of ministries on women is a necessary step towards full appreciation of women in the Church and for their recognition in non-subordinate roles in the community. However, we would be falling into a clerical vision if we think that we are only appreciated in the Church if we gain access to the ordained ministries.

I personally think that it is better for women to stay outside the

institutionalisation that comes with ministry. They are then freer to express a prophetic dimension of gift. I feel that the fact that women remain outside the ministries is not an exclusion, but it opens the way to an appreciation of an aspect of their gift, of which the Church has a particular need in order to speak to our times.

GIVE BIRTH TO A NEW WORLD

The condition of women in the world does not cease to be problematic, and yet it does not cease to bear unexpected signs of hope.

I would like to introduce this part of my reflection by recounting three stories that can demonstrate how women, with their initiatives, their down-to-earth approach, their ability to recognise the value of humble choices and small gestures, can contribute to bringing about a new world. They do so from the most desperate situations humanly speaking, lacking means and without a future.

Oana arrived in Italy from Romania ten years ago. She came only with the desire to escape from misery. However, life is not easy for a woman who is alone and foreign. After a few months, Oana realised that she was pregnant. She was faced with the alternative of having an abortion or of starting out on a journey that would get even steeper. She met some people who offered her help in a community where she could take care of herself and of her child. It is not easy for adults accustomed to a free life to subject themselves to a style and context that seems more like a school than a family, but Oana accepted this. She allowed her daughter to be born, and this child now, at ten years of age, speaks of the beauty of life and the love of a mother who, as an adult, agreed to begin to grow again and to become a real mother.

Suzana lives in Kosovo. She is a war widow and mother of four children. Today she is president of “Besimi”, an association that offers women the possibility of working and supporting themselves and their

families. It offers women – all of whom have at least one cow – the possibility of a constant income, guaranteed by means of the structures of the association. Now, every day, over seven hundred people collect and sell nine hundred litres of milk. In this way, entire families give life to a new social fabric that is held together by the concreteness of bonds that are formed through forgiveness and initiative.

Marisa lives in Peru, in the zone that was devastated by an earthquake on 15 August. After having lost everything, she chose to be strong and to keep going for the sake of the children who need to eat every day. Marisa organised the “common cooking pot” for those who were left with nothing. Now the common cooking pot that Marisa and thirty mothers who joined her run, feeds entire families.

These three stories speak of women who have humble and concrete dedication as they build up small corners of a world reborn in goodness. Their footsteps mark out the path that will lead one day to the civilisation of love. This may seem unreal or just a dream. However, we believe that the future must be faced with the courage of dreaming. This sensitivity is confirmed by the fact that the magisterium of the Church continues to speak of a civilisation of love, and in this way it asks us to continue believing that this is not an illusion but is a responsibility. This, like the dream of peace, is based on a promise. The civilisation of love will be the fruit of the intelligence and hearts of men and women, but it will not be built without the decisive contribution of women. They believe in love and know its effectiveness, concreteness and power.

In what ways can women contribute to the world of today and give birth to a new world?

I would like to name the first of these as being that of protecting and defending the sense of the primacy and value of the human person.

A person is the creature that the Creator “has willed for its own sake”,⁶ and therefore not in function of anything: not of efficiency nor

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

of profit. A person cannot be exploited, not even when the “cause” seems to be important. To have a sense of the primacy of the person means recognising the value of the person, even when people are in the most abused, humiliated or degraded state. It is to believe that it is not a waste of time when it is spent helping the dignity of someone to emerge or re-emerge. The sense of person also helps to put into perspective – reappearing in new forms – an ideology that risks losing the sense of proportion between facts, between opinions, between visions of life.

The sense of person is also the sense of the essential. This is definitely good sense!

In a society in which the sense of person is alive, there is a change in the world of work. Thinking becomes more open and more humble. Service structures change and there is human space for the weakest, whether they be children or the sick, elderly or foreigners. Wherever there is a sense of person, there is acceptance and awareness of life and commitment to defend its values by providing the best conditions for its growth and development.

Another way is to maintain the sense of motherhood and the value of life. Motherhood is going through a deep crisis. A sign of this is the crisis in the birthrate in European countries. Another sign is the desire to have a child at any cost by having recourse to assisted fertility. These are two contradictory signs that together show us how the experience of motherhood is being overwhelmed by the anthropological changes that are taking place. This situation cannot be tackled by extolling the beauty of motherhood, although it is not meaningless if there are those who, without rhetoric, know how to narrate the human intensity of this experience. It will not be confronted either – in the event that this could happen – by guaranteeing all women a cheque and adequate services, even though family policies are necessary to sustain families.

Perhaps we have before us a long period in which women can protect the human and social value of motherhood and will be able to face

the great effort of caring for home and job. It is a life of running around with a clock in your hand and your heart very often elsewhere. At the same time, women have to continue reflecting on the values of motherhood, and find within themselves those preliminary ethical ways to its acceptance. They can choose this way – vital for all of humanity – if they know how to involve men in such a way that they work together so that family and career are not alternatives; that biological motherhood and spiritual motherhood are not mutually absolutised; that together they guard and protect an experience that involves both of them.

The final way I would like to point out is to restore value to education. The weakening of the sense of person – being for the benefit of production, power or organisation – often entails less attention to education as being care for the person and a person's growth in humanity.

Any society that does not want to condemn itself to its own human decline, cannot do without education. Therefore we should feel concerned that education is being spoken of today as an emergency in our society. Emergency or crisis, education today carries the signs of undergoing a phase of transition in our system of values and references that is a characteristic of our times. It is urgent that we do something about this.

Educating is a special way of giving birth. Physical birth brings forth new life, and education generates its meaning and growth in humanity. Education is a spiritual generation.

As in giving birth, education has the same dynamics of pain and life. It begins by accepting those who today must grow and build their personality in a desert of values and meanings. It develops by proposing and accompanying, and this often experiences a dialectic (maternal) of death/life; closeness/distance; giving/silence; accompaniment/abandonment.

To educate means to take care of a person, to feel responsible – with respect and freedom – for the progress and growth of those entrusted to us. To be educators in these confusing and troubled times

is a task that certainly requires courage. We could say that a maternal disposition is needed in order to pass through the suffering of an epoch, of a culture, of so many minds, believing that what is happening now is a suffering that generates life.

There are many other ways that we should examine, including politics, and the safeguarding of creation and of peace, but this would be too long.

In the ways that I have mentioned, I have kept in mind that many women today often try with great difficulty to place at the disposal of society their resources in their professions, in politics and in financial activity, and they have to rely on models of organisation often marked exclusively by efficiency, profit and self-affirmation. They experience difficulty in fulfilling and expressing their femininity.

I know that giving birth to a new world cannot take place without action carried out in harmony by men and women, brought forward in the solidarity of both who know they are one, in the ongoing effort to build relationships of mutual esteem, respect, trust and appreciation. I am also convinced that it is the duty of women today to take on the commitment to devise styles of life in which they can express the “feminine genius”. They must help to build a culture that has need of the contribution of the feminine sensitivity that can overcome the one-sidedness of exclusively rational patterns so that it can also obtain richness of feeling and emotion as a resource for knowledge of reality. They must be more determined to take on solidarity towards the most forsaken and humiliated women, giving voice to their silence and campaigning for their dignity.

CONCLUSION

To give birth to a maternal Church; to give birth to a human world. I have summarised in those two phrases the responsibility of women towards the Church and society.

As in each experience of giving birth, this too will have its fruitfulness in suffering; forging ahead with gritted teeth; misunderstanding on the part of those who feel it is weakness to listen to the languages of the heart; disdainful judgement by those who maintain that dedication to relationships is a waste of time with respect to the more important questions of strategy, projects and decisions; condescension by those who see in a woman's complex approach to reality the sign of a psychological complication that would be a weakness and would slow up proceedings.

This generation, like all others, knows the experience of waiting – at times seeming interminable and hopeless – and the silence of those who keep in their hearts insights, promises and dreams ... but in the certainty of safeguarding a mystery.

II. PERSPECTIVES

II.1. Christianity and the advancement of women

Introduction

MARÍA ANTONIA BEL BRAVO*

Not so long ago, we celebrated the second millennium of the birth of Christ. It was not simply the commemoration of an anniversary. Two thousand years ago was the start of the Christian era, and we count our years from that moment. Here we see yet again how Christianity has permeated life at a universal level. Notwithstanding, it is still commonly heard that Christianity, and more specifically the Catholic Church, has been opposed to the progress of civilisation. In fact, we do not normally find Christianity listed among the progressive forces. On the contrary, the Church is accused of obscurantism and medievalism. The latter gives an idea of repression and opposition to the progress of modern times. This idea is very common, and it is a prejudice founded on ignorance of the historical facts. The opposite is actually the case.¹

The Second Vatican Council – the most important event of the twentieth century – was not called to examine or condemn doctrine, but to send out a central message for the third millennium: the Church is the only entity that can answer the questions posed by the world and human beings. The Council also pointed to Christ as the Lord and centre of history because the most important conquests of humanity throughout history were supported by Christianity. Before we go directly into our theme, I would like to look at some of these conquests.

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¹ A book recently published clarifies these questions: T.E. WOODS JR., *How the Catholic Church built Western Civilization*, Washington, DC, 2005. See also R. STARK, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, Baylor 2005.

SOME HISTORY

Slavery, which still persists in some parts of the world, was common in pre-Christian civilisations. Its origins, as we know, could have been due to war, inheritance, debts, etc. Nobody in antiquity considered it to be a deplorable evil. It was a common fact that people accepted. The appearance of Christianity, which proclaimed the equality of all, required a total change of mentality that little by little began to show fruit. We could say that when Christian ideas began to predominate, slavery began to cease. It was taken up again only in eras in which there was a certain forgetfulness of Christianity. Apostolic preaching attacked evil at its roots, thus removing its foundations. They taught the original and radical equality of human beings before God, which asks us to love everyone as ourselves. There are many documented proofs of this throughout the course of the centuries.

Human rights, apparently a conquest of the twentieth century, are quite a lot older. The first person to speak of them was a fourteenth century pope, Clement VI, and they were later developed in the Salamanca School (Vitoria, Soto, etc.). Naturally, they all recognised that these rights are present in the Gospels.

Christianity certainly developed the idea of progress by demonstrating that progress does not mean to possess more, but to be better. In that sense, all the religious movements throughout the centuries have spoken out, and the lay movements in the twentieth century worked in that same spirit. We do not have to wait for the twentieth century to see big leaps in quality in the field of human progress. Here are some of them:

– Saint Benedict in the fifth and sixth century, with *ora et labora*, in the solitude of the fields, exalted the dignity of work.

– The mendicant orders in the thirteenth century – Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Dominic de Guzmán – shifted the centre of gravity

from the rural to the urban areas, because there was a merchant bourgeoisie emerging there who were in need of God. They established convents in the centre of the cities.

– Saint Ignatius of Loyola lived in the sixteenth century when there was the problem presented by Protestantism, and what is more to the point, the need for Catholic reform. He paved the way for the important Council of Trent for clarification on Church doctrine as well as discipline. By means of education, the Company of Jesus which he founded, would encourage extensive study of Christianity, thereby demonstrating that education is the real factor in human progress.

– Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer in the twentieth century affirmed the centrality of work and daily life as means of holiness for Christians who do not wish to abandon the world. Work is not seen as a dimension of the market but as a means of personal perfection.

Therefore, to the extent that human beings are capable of defining the real meaning of progress, they will also be capable of building a new millennium. It is sad to see that in the twentieth century we were able to progress so little. This mostly happened because we confused the means (merely technical progress) with the aim, and the confusion was such that it meant that it was the most cruel century in history (two world wars, Nazism, atom bomb, holocaust and countless persecutions against the Catholic Church, etc.). We shall speak of this later.

The challenge of the twenty-first century is, in the words of John Paul II, to cross the threshold of hope.² How? In the first place, with personal conversion and examination of conscience with respect to the history of the Church. We should be aware that it contains much that was positive, infinitely more than what was negative. Moreover, European identity can-

² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, New York 1995. The book speaks very much about this challenge.

not be understood without Christianity. The document *Memory and Reconciliation* gives much light on this topic.³ I shall not attempt to deal with this document in depth. I shall only mention some of the issues outlined, and leave it to the reader to study it personally. I should hasten to emphasise that if we are to really understand this document, we must distinguish between the holiness of the Church and holiness in the Church. In order to correct the faults of the past, we first need to identify them. We need to avoid “both an apologetics that seeks to justify everything and an unwarranted laying of blame, based on historically untenable attributions of responsibility”.⁴ For this reason the document refers to certain topics, for example, violence in the service of truth, and more specifically, religious wars. Their origins are to be found in the division between Thomists and Occamists in the fourteenth century. Instead of leading to dialogue they led to division. At that time political powers were tempted to take this opportunity to present a Church divided in the service of the State. That led to the religious wars that would end in Westphalia in 1648 with political absolutism (there is nothing above the State), a problem that endured until the twentieth century. It was for this reason that such efforts were made to institute a supranational organisation like the United Nations. It has no power, but it has authority, and it can curb abuses in some states and by leaders.

Another reason to ask forgiveness in that document is the relationship between Christianity and Judaism which was undoubtedly a troubled relationship throughout history. However, it is important not to confuse anti-Judaism with anti-Semitism.⁵ Anti-Judaism is based on the mistaken belief that Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. It is of a religious nature because they considered those who ignored the true

³ Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Memory and Reconciliation. The Church and the Faults of the Past*, 2000.

⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

⁵ There is an extensive bibliography on this subject. I recommend my book: *Separad. Los judíos de España*. Madrid 2006³.

faith to be “perfidious”. Anti-Semitism is a pagan movement based on race and on the consideration that some races are superior to others. From 1963 the Catholic Church recognised the Jews to be elder brothers, and so productive dialogue could begin. Old recriminations were replaced by earnest research into doctrine and sentiments that largely coincided. Now we shall see the factors that modernity introduced to the concept of progress and that transformed it into a confused muddle.

PROGRESS

The ideology of progress is not peculiar to modernity. It was present in classical thought, understood as the gradual advance of that which is imperfect towards that which is perfect, because the nature of a thing is not determined so much by its initial situation as by its final perfection. Things are what they will be when they reach their plenitude. The reality of being of a thing is defined by the perfection which it is capable of achieving. This dynamic vision of reality was substituted in Illuminism by a mechanistic approach.⁶ This ideology was already present in classical thought, although this progress in some cases, through human freedom, could suffer setbacks and work in reverse. The difference with the model of progress imposed in modern times is that our times consider it to be necessarily irreversible and linear, insofar as it is a political-cultural variant of the ideology of indefinite economic growth, on which it basically depends.

“The future is the main category introduced by modernity: all that is yet to happen is better than that which has already occurred, presupposing that it is drawn from the idea of progress. With this certainty the future, which is everything, is of little importance. However it may be, it will always be better than the present. The progressive person lives

⁶ Cf. M.A. BEL BRAVO, *La mujer en la Historia*, Madrid 1998, 34.

open to the future, without really worrying about it”.⁷ The problem is that with this concept they justify violence and war because, if all that happens in history is linear and can be justified, then so too can violence. The inevitability of historical progress leads to the elimination of distinction between good and evil as a significant sign of human action. What counts is the result of progress. Evil, insofar as it is historically necessary, is converted into being good. Again we observe reason being transformed into a “mysterious hand” that takes the place of Providence, here in the sphere of politics.

The concept of linear progress has frightening consequences: the Western world takes the lead, being the “only civilised” world and, obviously, of the masculine gender. This inevitably leads to the exclusion and exploitation of the rest of the world. It reached a height at the Berlin Conference of 1885 in which they completed the partition of Africa. In the same way, for Darwin and his disciples, only the fittest deserve to survive. Races are “inferior” when they lack the spirit of competition and when they are marked by the feminine qualities of intuition and cooperation. For that reason it came to the point where it was preferable to be descended from a small and heroic monkey than from the inferior races.

This way of viewing relations with others implies a regression with respect to the religious approach of the preceding centuries and it undoubtedly gives us some indications to help “understand” the situation of women in the centuries dominated by modernity. As Toynbee demonstrated in his *A Study of History*, there is no greater level of inhumanity than that of considering other races to be inferior claiming that they have been irreversibly denied the human condition. Nazism was not the only system, nor the last, to put this idea forward. A few years ago, there was a story in a Miami newspaper – *El Nuevo Herald* – about mass sterilisation of women in Peru because of the birth control

⁷ I. SOTELO, “La España del año 2000”, in: *Revista de Occidente*, 77 (1987), 19, cited by J. BALLESTEROS in: *Postmodernidad, decadencia o resistencia*, Madrid 1988.

policies of the government. They were doing so against the will, or without the previous authorisation, of those directly involved. In the same way, the slow recovery of Roman law, together with this strange way of “reasoning”, is what would justify the black slave trade and the systematic exclusion of women from public life, facts intimately linked with modernity.

KINDS OF FEMINISM

Modernity urgently needs to be saved from itself. We need to redeem the authentic human achievements that we owe to modernity and free them from their modernistic interpretation and the consequent trend of self-annulment. A correction, or better, an overcoming of modernity towards authentic contemporaneity, means to perceive that it is possible to differentiate it from its ideological version and help it to recover the “sense” that was lost. From this point of view, as we shall see, it might have been “fortunate” that women were excluded until very recently from the public sphere. This is because, except for some exceptions, neither their tendencies nor the few possibilities of intervention at their disposal allowed them to act in accordance with the suppositions of modernity.

Nonetheless, feminist claims based on the hegemonic principles of modernity (especially individualism and voluntarism) caused the problem to explode, but were not the solution. They were part of a wider intellectual and social movement “that tried to justify the elimination of legal discrimination against individuals on account of their birth”. There had been claims for the rights of the middle classes, servants, Jews, workers, slaves, etc. Now it was the hour of women.⁸

⁸ Cf. M.A. BEL BRAVO, “El feminismo hoy: igualdad y diferencia” in: *Anuario del Seminario Permanente de derechos humanos de la Universidad de Jaén*, 1 (1994), 84ff.

To the ideological influences already indicated there were added the political, economic and social that have discriminated against women and encouraged the feminist revolt. The contradictions of illuminist philosophy provoked strong tensions, because it developed the modern concepts of human nature and human rights, ordaining the submission of women to men, and especially the model of development of modernity.

The industrial revolution and urbanisation profoundly modified ways of living and working, giving rise to an ongoing increase in migration from rural areas to the cities, from countries to the colonies, and brought about huge family and social changes. The pre-industrial family was “extended”. Several generations lived together in a productive unity where house and work were deeply united. The women in those families could not have undergone discrimination because they collaborated in the various activities and were aware of the centrality and need of their contribution. But then the men of the family went to the factories in the cities or in the colonies to earn a salary, and the women remained at home to care for the children and the elderly. Thus, unlike what happened in the Middle Ages, women in the modern era were excluded from participation in political, economic and cultural life.

Hegel theoretically justified the causes of that marginalisation by pointing out that “the male represented the objectivity and universality of knowledge, while women embodied subjectivity and individuality dominated by sentiment. Therefore, in relations with the external world, the males meant strength and activity while the females meant weakness and passivity”.⁹ The male had to be fulfilled through three hegemonic activities: science, state and economics (the three activities that Max Weber¹⁰ considered to be the patrimony of Western civilisa-

⁹ Cited in: J. BALLESTEROS, *Postmodernidad, decadencia o resistencia*, op. cit., 128.

¹⁰ Cf. M. WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York 1958.

tion), while women's place was reduced to the family, if you consider it reductive to create "a warm and formative atmosphere around her".¹¹ Hegel and so many other intellectuals and politicians of that time rejected the possibility that women could be admitted to those three activities. They commented that the presence of women in these fields would bring about failure.

In any case, women could exercise their influence directly and indirectly. Although limited in number, there were actually some who took part directly in systems of power, in eras and regimes of male monopoly. We recall, for example, the "traditional" revolutionary women like the French in 1789 and the Spaniards in 1936. However, in most cases, women's real influential power could be seen to take place in an indirect way. Women used their own means, even with "passivity" in a domain that was specifically male, and invaded in their own way the sphere of power that seemed to be, according to the leaders of their time, alien to them.¹² We have an extreme example in the harems of the Ottoman aristocracy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where effective forms of conspiracy and rebellion broke out. It is also possible to see this in rural Europe to this day, for example in Spanish Galicia. Does all of this bring us to understand politics in a different way?

In this sense, according to Janet M. Burke and Margaret C. Jacob,¹³ a culturally true history of the French Enlightenment would put a handful of women at the centre. Women who controlled the Parisian salons – *salonnières* – between 1749 and 1776, and who were able to control the collective discourse of those who, as citizens of the *Republic of Letters*, did not want women's power of the word to become the basis of

¹¹ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Dublin 1972, 87.

¹² Cf. J. ANDRÉS-GALLEGO, *Recreación del Humanismo desde la Historia*, Madrid 1994.

¹³ Cf. J.M. BURKE – M.C. JACOB, "French Freemasonry, Women and Feminist Scholarship", in: *The Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996), University of Chicago, 513-549.

their power over people. According to these two authors, the art of managing a salon allowed those women to manage men's egos without imposing their own. Their theory is that these women of the Enlightenment saved men from themselves, and in the process saved the Enlightenment, because the salons were places where men came to agreements due to the interventions of women. After the demise of the last *salonnière*, the French Enlightenment, having come from the Masonic lodges, became masculinised.

On the other hand, Julián Marías¹⁴ made an exhaustive study in several of his works on the situation of women in the nineteenth and twentieth century and their important social contribution. He pointed out that women were the repositories of private life in all its forms. They had decisive influence, with their femininity, in the lives and customs of men. They inspired literary, artistic and humanistic culture. They collaborated, preserved and transmitted religious and ethical values, and educated their children, and they carried out numerous social and charitable services. Their most important role was that of creating, caring for and maintaining a strong and stable family life and the education of their children. Many of them were happy because they felt useful and were not searching for anything different. "In her work of creating a warm and formative atmosphere around her, a woman fulfils the most indispensable part of her mission".¹⁵

In this context, as we can see, the importance of women is indisputable. Nonetheless, in general terms, the alternative chosen by women – so as not to be considered passive and to achieve a certain personal autonomy – was the imitation of men's way of doing things. In some cases they chose the more negative ways of men, like their irresponsible use of sexuality and their lack of attention to the family. The

¹⁴ Cf. J. MARIAS, *La mujer en el siglo XX*, Madrid 1990, 24-72.

¹⁵ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, op. cit., 87.

fact is that there is a substantial difference between imitating and “learning from”. My recent studies¹⁶ brought me to look at women’s “other way of doing things” in other eras. They show how they can respond – perhaps with more success and without having recourse to the simple expedient of imitation – to the challenges of the world today. One of the most important is that of changing culture so that it may support life.

From a certain point of view it is very positive that, as I said before, women did not go along with certain aspects of modernity during the period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. It is true that in many cases this was due to the fact that the opportunities were not given to them. It is also true that in other cases it was offered and rejected, because the filter through which women observe and become movers in social, political, economic and cultural events in the world that surrounds them, is very different from that of men. In any case, when we see the disasters that accompanied the great conquests of that period, we can say that at least one half of humanity was not in agreement with them.

However, the kind of feminism that allied itself with a decadent and shrill form of modernity in the twentieth century, did women no favours because it deprived them of their identity. This was not of good service to the cause. The main problem with this now outmoded form of feminism was the lack of an anthropological vision that would give substance to the recognition of the difference between the sexes. This is because it was limited to making it possible for women, from an egalitarian point of view, to imitate men.

The current gender-type feminism does not help women either

¹⁶ See my recent article “Familia y género en la Edad Moderna: pautas para su estudio”, in: *Memoria y Civilización* 9 (2006), 13-49. See also: “Apuntes para una Historia del cristianismo en La Nueva España a través de la literatura y la actividad educativa femenina”, in: *Hispania Sacra*, vol. LVIII, January-June 2006.

because it claims that both masculinity and femininity are socially independent constructs. But “woman” is something more than a cultural gender. A woman is a person, and therefore relational nature. Interpersonal relations are based and nourished in the sexed condition, male and female, of the human being. These relationships certainly have to be expressed in culture. They generate it and live within it. Culture is made possible because of those radical relationships and not vice versa, notwithstanding their natural interaction and interdependence. Another question entirely is that of keeping watch to ensure that these relationships are distinguished by freedom and equality, instead of by oppression which is so frequent in the history of women. All in all, there needs to be vigilance in order to have a more reasonable dialogue between nature and culture.

WOMEN AND CHRISTIANITY

The essential equality of all human beings was first demonstrated in Christianity, and Christian marriage has contributed much to the dignity of women. I shall now deal with some basic methodological questions for an approach to history and historians. I shall not speak of equality, but I shall employ the concept of dignity, normally used in Christianity, because it includes the concept of equality. Finally, I shall propose an historical approach to deal not only with what women have not been able to do but with what they have done, in spite of the fact that there were many periods in history when circumstances were not favourable.

We historians deal with the study of the past, and for this reason we have to begin by defining, even briefly, what we mean by history and by the task of a historian, and how a historian cannot study reality beyond the confines of reality. Why do I say this? It is because it is a problem for some who call themselves historians but do not want to admit the

incontestable fact that the advancement of women was helped by Christianity. It is an ideological approach, not scientific, because in history there are things that are irrefutable, and those things are documented proofs, and these, as I have said, are incontestable. Even today, in countries with several religions, it is the Christian women who are in the best situation, a fact that was recently demonstrated in a study on India.

On the other hand, this atavistic resistance to admitting that Christianity has done much for women, is another demonstration of the persecution we suffer as disciples of Christ. The same people deny that Western civilisation in general (art, science, economics, law, universities, etc.) owes much to the Church.¹⁷

Leaving aside religious prejudice, or rather antireligious, and keeping to scientific explanations, the problem derives mostly from tackling the subject of women from a feminist historiographic viewpoint. A feminist historiography is not sufficient, because the study of the exploitation of women by men – a classical theme of feminism – is reductive. In any serious historical study, exploitation will appear to the full extent of its existence, unless there is an attempt to hide reality. So, to deal with exploitation as a fundamental object for analysis would be correct only if human relations were principally or exclusively relations of exploitation. If they are not, a history that only deals with those relations is incomplete, if not false. Feminism was undoubtedly the detonator that launched an analysis of forgotten reality, but it is not an adequate instrument to analyse those same realities, which are much richer and more complex, as many recent studies have demonstrated at length.

We must look at the subject with new eyes, with scientific criteria that come to us from historical science, free of prejudice and anachronisms. We must be aware of the grave error that is committed when we analyse the facts of the past conditioned by prejudices or by modern

¹⁷ See note no. 1.

criteria. In this sense we must give due importance to research method, and take into account that method must adapt to the object of research and not the object to the method, because it is reality that regulates methodological access and not vice versa.

At present, individual experience takes over and ends up by being the central issue. This individualistic vision emerges from progressive denial that rests on the serial treatment of data and on the use of collective categories. The central issue of history now is not that of circumstances that revolve around human beings, but that of men and women in their circumstances. Thus, we are passing from group categories to individual categories, from explanatory models of change, stratified and monocausal, to interconnected and pluricausal, from group quantification to individual example.

The conclusion of this crisis comes after objective scientism has been overcome. Objectivism is the attitude that breaks up the cultural and historical unity of life. It is a formalistic rationalism that dogmatically postulates dualism between subject and object. If modern times – notwithstanding undeniable scientific and technical successes – have fallen into growing dissatisfaction almost to the point of anguish, it is because they have attached themselves to the unilateralism of a method that is incapable of connecting the idealism of science with the field of work through which the themes and scientific methods have a meaning. If modern historiography aims to break down objectivism, it is because, as I have attempted to demonstrate in various studies,¹⁸ it does not serve as a method for historical study. It is like wanting to study reality by doing without reality. It is not enough to measure, weigh and count the material objects, and it is not enough to have recourse to statistical data. A historian is interested above all in people in their twofold dimension of material and spirit.

¹⁸ Cf. M.A. BEL BRAVO, *La mujer en la Historia*, op. cit.; see also: IDEM, *La familia en la Historia*, Madrid 2000.

Introduction

In the individualistic position that we have been speaking of, the general objective of historiography and the history of women in particular, cannot consist of a study of the structures and supposed mechanisms that regulate social relations. This was the previous aim, and it left aside any subjective appreciation. Nowadays, however, the self-referential sense of history is the cornerstone of the new historiographical criteria, especially the emphasis on the role of human action, with the relative weakening of the determining, or simply operative, force of structures. I think that this new vision can put an end to both prejudice and anachronisms, real pathologies in the study of history.

With that I shall pass on to the second point of my talk, relating to the anachronisms with which the question of women has sometimes been approached, especially in relation to Christianity. A real anachronism is, for example, to speak of equality in times when this was not a clear concept nor was it predominant. At the same time, it is avoiding the concept of dignity which is much wider because it incorporates equality. It has always been used by the Church to speak of women.

What did the dignity of women consist of in times past? In order to find the answer we must respectfully penetrate the mentality of the epoch under study. That mentality was Christian. Christianity has always considered women to have the same dignity as men, with the same rights and the same obligations. What Christianity has never asked women to do is to renounce their identity. They have been asked to do so by several feminist movements who presume to defend women. One of the roles of women that the Church has always placed great value on is that of mother. The great dignity of women finds its foundation in the fact that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way.¹⁹ Why? It is because of the intimate union she has with life, not only during the period of gestation, but throughout the life cycle: from

¹⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 30.

infancy to old age. Unlike other animal species, nature created human beings defenceless and unable to take care of themselves for a relatively long period of their existence. This prolonging of childhood – and of adolescence and youth, in the broad sense – expresses the natural purpose proper to each individual to “become a person” and thus also to “become a citizen”. These are two converging processes that historically have always been entrusted to women and the family, because of their essential functions in primary and constitutive socialisation, which emerges from the bonds of marriage.

Therefore, the earliest socialisation of human beings depend on women, the first education on the principles that rule all of the established order, comprising the civic, social and political “virtues” that sustain civil society, including the State. Our ancestors believed, and I think rightly so, that society can be no better than the families that constitute it.²⁰

The family, understood in this way, has occupied a privileged position in the teachings of the Church from the first to the twentieth centuries, that is, always. Christianity – whether we like it or not – is the best reference to understanding fully the way of thinking of the medieval period, the modern period, and a great part of the contemporary period, because it succeeded in allowing the family to foreshadow the internal cohesion and the “moral quality” of the whole of society.

The essential functions carried out by women in the family did not escape the attention of Catholic thinkers and reformers.²¹ They spoke of this in their writings, and therefore it could not escape the attention of

²⁰ See note no. 16.

²¹ Both the humanists and the Spanish reformers of the seventeenth century (*Arbitristas*) studied this theme. They said, for example, that the crisis of the seventeenth century was due to moral disorder more than to problems of politics, economics, epidemics or war. See my *La Familia en los Tratadistas de época Moderna: una propuesta para nuestros días*, a talk given at the 12th Congress on Science and Life, University of Valencia, July 2006, published in: www.ulia.org/ficv/docs2006.htm.

the politicians. The destiny of the family was considered to be essential for the well-being of society and, whenever a problem arose, they took measures to ensure its good health, because they considered it to be the only natural society in existence. A family is obviously aware that it is not sufficient to procreate and that education is an essential dimension of motherhood and fatherhood. A family is based on the equality of a man and woman that endeavours to eradicate two vices: male independence and female subordination.

On the other hand, we must emphasise that in previous ages people had a deep religious sense. Beyond every social division between rich and poor, nobles and common folk, the really basic element of society was the concept of honour,²² of fairness, linked to religion. The place occupied by a person in the social hierarchy was not important, as long as they carried out their role with due Christian dignity. It was a whole system of values, linked to culture, religion and living conditions, capable of sustaining relationships between individuals and that served as a measure of the morality of an action. They made modern society much more than a simple hierarchy of groups or sectors united by some common features.

Finally, why should we look to history only to observe what women could not do, instead of studying what they could do, even though social conditions did not make things easy for them? Notwithstanding the solid patriarchal culture that stresses the role of men in social life, to the extent of subordinating and at times almost abolishing the role of women, the female presence qualitatively marks the way human beings show themselves to be persons. In discovering the importance of women, who cannot disown their identity, not even in difficult or conflicting circumstances, there are times when they have fulfilment and

²² It would be too much to list all the literary works of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro* in which this was the central theme. This is because it was an important feature of the Modern Age: Lope de Vega and Calderón are two of the main exponents.

social standing, as well as times when the feminine sphere is hidden, wounded or silenced.

I would not like us to look to history only to search for the masculine. If it were like that, it would be a problem, because I am convinced that one of the causes of the crisis of modernity is the one-sided emphasis on the masculine sphere. It would be necessary for historians in general, and Christians in particular, to recover feminine culture, the special way in which women deal with problems.

I am thinking of an example. In the film *A man for all seasons*,²³ Alice More was interested in an issue in English politics at a time that was marking in a particular way the life of her husband Thomas and their family. He retorted angrily: “woman, you just take care of your household”. Alice replied: “I am taking care of my household”. This is the feminine view. There are no divisions for women. Divisions are pure theory, not reality. For women, everything is united. It is very difficult to see contradictions where there are only contrasts, and this is what modernity sought. Feminine intelligence, more concrete than masculine intelligence because of the wide series of occupations that they have had to undertake throughout the course of history, and which is, moreover, multifaceted and relational, allows women to tackle different problems at the same time.

The point is that so much emphasis has been given to great personalities, the conventional institutions and important events, that many human groups, with their lives and experiences, seem not to have ever existed. Undoubtedly, although women had influence, either officially or anonymously, history was developed with a lack of curiosity or interest in recovering the mute or hidden existence of exceptional women who have had great influence over those near them.

“She was my government”, commented one of Claudio Magris’s characters in his play *Microcosms*, referring to his wife who had recently

²³ “A Man For All Seasons”, directed by Fred Zinnemann in 1966.

passed away. In this short phrase there is a great truth: the male universe is lost and without guidance when it lacks the “feminine genius”, as John Paul II used to call it. Perhaps men have commanded with their opinions, but women have governed with their voices, and in many cases, also with their silence.

I would like to conclude this talk by quoting again John Paul II of fond memory. In an audience granted to Maria Antonietta Macciocchi he said: I believe in the genius of women. Even in the darkest periods of history we find that this genius is present as the leavening in human progress”.²⁴ This means that Christianity has not only helped to advance women, but it also sees them as the leavening of true progress: human progress.

²⁴ Cited in: M.A. MACCIOCCHI, “Creo en el genio de la mujer, in: *El Mundo*, Sunday, 3 April 2005. Year XVII. Number: 5.591. This same idea is found in *Letter to Women*, written by the Pope on the occasion of the 4th UN International Conference held in Beijing in 1995.

The feminine question in Edith Stein

Elements of a dual anthropology

ANGELA ALES BELLO*

DUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Every woman we meet each appears to us in her singularity. Actually, we never meet women or men in the abstract, but always as a person with distinctive characteristics. This is an indisputable fact drawn from our experience. However, even our language causes us to generalise, and so, when we speak of women, we are searching for that characteristic element that is present in all women. This kind of enquiry is considered to be essential in the area of research that we call philosophical. In reality, we are not content to accept singularity. We tend towards generality, or better still, universality, a universality of structure that we recognise as being present when we meet a woman or several women. On recognising it we can say that they are women. However, what is it that we really “recognise”? They come towards us with a certain physical structure, and this fact already presents a great paradox: each of them is unique and unrepeatable, yet they are all women.

This fact brings us to analyse their corporeity. We know that Western culture with its scientific formulations has tried to penetrate corporeity itself. It has examined it from many perspectives under the profile of physiology, anatomy and genetics, and it has pointed out the characteristics of the female body that are then expressed in a particular way

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in each woman. On this basis, as we know, medicine works by identifying the disorders and proceeding with the cure.

At this point two questions arise. The first concerns the fact that women have a particular anatomical configuration, but that many of their characteristics are the same as the other human beings – men. We can actually speak of the human body which goes beyond the specifications of the female and the male. It is this statement that takes us to the second question: if we cannot analyse a woman without taking into consideration that she is a human being, we must also correlatively examine the man.

How can we form a theoretical framework on this from a wider point of view, one that we can define as philosophical? It is precisely the examination of one single person that refers us to the universality of the human being, but again we are constrained to descend to the subdivision of the male and the female, before we can arrive at the singularity. In reality, as we mentioned above, it is also possible to take this in reverse, and therefore the two paths are correlative and circular.

This all brings us to reflect on the fact that we cannot examine woman without examining man, and, in more general terms, if we want to proceed to an analysis of the human being that is thorough, and hence a valid anthropology, then it has to include a dual anthropology. So, if it is true that we can point to some universal elements that distinguish, for example, human beings from animals or vegetables, then a necessary study of the human structure will lead us to accept duality as an important and essential element. This is the essential coexistence of universality, duality and singularity.

This observation allows us to evaluate the phenomenon of feminism, because, although we recognise the importance of this phenomenon which shaped the twentieth century in Western culture, now we can denounce the unilateralism of its positions. It has, moreover, tried to describe the autonomous characteristics of the feminine and to reclaim the legitimate rights of women, without embarking on radical

research of the feminine and the masculine as determinants of the human being. It is true that we do not meet a human being as a generality but as a single person, and this person is a woman or a man, so now our attention must move from the particularity to universality, passing through duality.

We must recognise, however, that this point of arrival is the mature result of a process called for by the emergence of the feminist movement. Indeed, it was this cultural revolution that moved us to undertake anthropological research that is increasingly more comprehensive. It is necessary, therefore, to place dual anthropology in relation with the feminine question and to briefly examine the genesis of the latter in order to arrive at Edith Stein's theoretical formulation that allows us to establish the connection between the two questions.

GENESIS OF THE FEMININE QUESTION

A brief historical review could be useful in order to understand the emergence of the feminine question and to trace women's path of self-discovery.

An important point of reference for an historical reconstruction is *A History of Women in the West*, in five volumes edited by Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot and published in the nineteen-nineties. If we look at the volume dealing with the nineteenth century,¹ we read in the introduction that this was the century of the birth of feminism, understood as the phenomenon that would go on to produce major structural changes. These changes included salaried work, civil rights, the right to an education, and the collective appearance of women on the political scene as active participants, that is, as full citizens. All of this would

¹ *A History of Women in the West*, Volume IV, *Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, Harvard 1998.

really be obtained in the following century, the twentieth century. The cited volume and the previous one on the Modern Age both lack a deep analysis of the reasons that led women to demand at least effective parity with men. These reasons can be found in the changes that took place on the ethical-religious plane, and therefore are reflected in the vision that human beings have of themselves.

We should not forget that Italian Humanism, through thinkers like Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, opened up pathways to reflection on the centrality of the human being. They studied the Christian message from a philosophical and theological point of view, and considered the religious dimension as fundamental. However, these thinkers did not concentrate on the twofold aspect of man-woman. They only supplied basic information about the human being. Although it was important to ask the anthropological question from a philosophical point of view, the true revolution carried out in Western culture was to have approached it from the religious point of view.

It is in the sphere of the Reformation that we must identify important signs that would lead to claims for women to have a public role. The relationship between women and the Church became stronger. This is emphasised in an example contained in *A History of Women in the West* that studies the question, but it does not give this relationship sufficient importance in the general understanding of the feminine question. It is dealt with as a marginal aspect, whereas what is seen in the example indicates that this is the core of the emergence of women's self-awareness. "The Churches mostly offered a community of believers, in which there was continuous recourse to the Creator of everything and of everyone, so that all of life became an experience that was essentially shared: the changing of the seasons, a good and bad harvest, birth, illness, education, marriage, death".² Women were not fully

² E. SCHULTE VAN KASSEL, "Vergini e madri fra cielo e terra", in: *Storia delle donne. Dal Rinascimento all'Età Moderna*, ed. N. DAVIS and A. FARGE, Roma-Bari 1991.

inserted in social life and the professions, but in the context of Church they could cultivate an ethical ideal that “represented the only service not connected to sex, in which they could be equal to, if not outdo men”, and look forward to a future life after death, different from this one on earth, in which there was parity between the sexes.

The more radical Protestant communities had hypothesized equality between men and women in the earthly dimension. A demonstration of this can be seen in the English revolution in which democratic ideas, formulated in the religious sects, are basically requests for rights by women and – something new – not women belonging to the dominant classes, but rather those from the lower classes. In this way, they did something that was surprising and unheard of until that time. They were asking that patriarchal rights be overturned. They were moved by the conviction that “God was on their side, because God was always prepared to receive requests from everyone. God did not differentiate between people and therefore parliament should behave in the same way”.³

As we can see, the ultimate justification is ethical-religious. Indeed, it demands coherence between the principles stated – equality of human beings before God – and conduct, both private and public. This justification was not received by the men in the religious communities where it had emerged, but its centrality is not taken up either by the authors of *A History of Women in the West*, because the memory has been lost of the religious incentive that was at the basis of the demands, because of the process of secularisation under way in western culture. The demands for human rights were drafted in a Christian context that sustained, at least theoretically, the dignity of the human person. All of this is clearly demonstrated in the way the English Revolution proceeded, and in how it was secularised in the French Revolution, and we cannot forget the Puritan roots of the American Revolution.

³ N. ZEMON DAVIS, *Donne e politica*, in: *ibid.*, 216.

The ideas and proposals that were developed came together in the movements of the nineteenth century, but even in that century not everything that was requested was obtained, so it was necessary to demand “rights”: “given the situation in which women found themselves in the nineteenth century, from whatever perspective the subject was seen – work, customs, education, couples – [...] sooner or later the question of rights arose, rights to be refused or granted”.⁴ This tension gave rise to feminist movements.

If we retrace the stages marked by some significant points in the history of European feminism, we see that the countries directly involved are England, France and Germany. Feminism is linked from time to time to political ideas formulated in the post-revolution era, and hence, first of all to liberal ideas and then to socialist ideas. The recurring theme is equality of the sexes, to which there was progressively added the moral superiority of women. The secularising of the demands for equality, the origins of which, as we have said, were religious, did not prevent some feminist groups from maintaining a religious characteristic, like the Quaker groups in England and the United States or the “Revival” in Switzerland and Holland. In Germany towards the middle of the century, members of Liberal Protestantism and the German Catholic Movement wondered about the feminine question. In the United States as well, the movements of religious renewal led women to take up political involvement that was connected with anti-slavery. All of Europe took some interest in the phenomenon, even if not to the same extent. There were only some individuals or small groups in Italy, Poland and Czechoslovakia.

A testimony to the progress of feminism was the women’s press and the increase in the number of circles and associations. This phenomenon was consolidated in the twentieth century and is linked to the tur-

⁴ A.L. MAUGE, “Nuova Eva e vecchio Adamo”. Identità sessuali in crisi, in: *Storia delle donne. L'Ottocento*, op. cit., 524.

bulent political and military events that led to the world wars and to the fascist, Nazi and Bolshevik revolutions. These phenomena also displayed negativity with respect to the feminine question.

It is difficult to give a single interpretation to the feminist movements of the twentieth century. One of the reasons for this is that each group is inspired by a particular anthropology on which a political perspective depends. The strongly secularised currents are divided between those that are broadly liberal and those that are socialist and use the word feminism. The other movements, which maintain a stronger link with the religious origin, prefer to define themselves – at least until a decade ago – as women's movements.

What is being discussed is precisely the subject of equality and difference. We have noted that feminist demands, which from the beginning were concerned with rights, first of all emphasised the requirement of parity with the masculine world. Difference was used, in fact, by male power as a sign of discrimination. This explains why women in that first phase often carried the demand for equality to the extreme, even invading the area of sexuality, with the consequent theorisation of sexual freedom. Given the resistance – objectively observed – of the masculine world, all of this could only be done by struggling. In this way we can understand the aggressive attitude and also the separation and opposition of the sexes. The theme of the moral superiority of women justified, on the other hand, the fact that they formed closed alternative groups.

Male philosophical speculation – if we exclude Jacques Maritain – did not really help to resolve the problem.⁵ George Simmel saw that the position of strength of men was a clear act of injustice, but he contributed to the affirmation that the sexual dimension was important as it was the only liberating space for women. On the other hand, Ortega y

⁵ F. COLLIN, “La disputa sulla differenza: la differenza fra i sessi e il problema delle donne in filosofia”, in: *Storia delle donne. Il Novecento*, Roma-Bari 1992.

Gasset, declared women to be constitutively inferior, and he encouraged them to be ornaments and nourishment for the lives of men. Max Scheler only mentions them for the social role they can play in opposition to the instrumentality of the modern age. Sigmund Freud also defined the female sex negatively in relation to the male. He claimed that the female sex did not possess autonomy. In his school we have to wait for Melanie Klein to find that femininity has a richness that parallels that of masculinity. However, we should remember that one of the first writings that describes women and was written with great openness and intelligence, was by Abelardo Lobato, *La pregunta por la mujer*, dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir, Edith Stein and Simone Weil.

These brief ideas can help us to understand why a thinker like Simone de Beauvoir fought against sexual difference in the name of equality. She did so to the point of stating that a person is not born a woman, that there are no natural or essential differences between men and women, and that one becomes a woman for cultural reasons. Difference is, in fact, often interpreted as the source of discrimination, operated by men in order to enclose women in a separate role and space. Difference is synonymous with discrimination. In order to recover a balanced reflection on difference, we must go some steps further, as we shall see.

WOMEN'S SELF-REFLECTION. EDITH STEIN'S POSITION

Simone de Beauvoir initiated research by women about woman, about the feminine dimension, that developed within Christian circles, Evangelical and Catholic, as well as in secular circles. From the nineteen-seventies the egalitarian trend went into crisis, not because there was no desire to claim equality of rights, but because in some Western countries these rights had been recognised – at least formally. Therefore a reflection began on the specificity of the feminine. This does not go

against the fundamental equality and parity of all human beings, but it presupposes it precisely in order to emphasise the difference.

That this theme is extremely Christian can be demonstrated by examining the ideas of Edith Stein. It is worth spending time on them in order to see the comprehensiveness of her research on the feminine and the masculine.

In the nineteen-thirties Edith Stein took a stance with regard to the feminine condition in a series of lectures collected under the title *Woman*.⁶ On the one hand, it was a response to feminist movements. She knew them well and from them she learned to appreciate the function of severance. On the other hand, it was an entreaty directed to Catholic women's movements and especially to Catholic teachers. In fact, she drew on her own experience as a teacher to examine the role and the public and private function of women. She wondered what the future of her students could be. They were preparing to become teachers and studied at the Institute of Saint Magdalen run by the Dominican Sisters in Speyer where she was teaching.

Her lectures and the essay *Problems of Women's Education* cover a period of time that went from 1928 to 1932. The lectures testify to her work with the Catholic Scholastic Movement and the Catholic Women's Movement. The essay is the manuscript of the lessons she gave at the Institute of Educational Science in Münster where she was teaching during the summer term of 1932. These writings all refer to the philosophical studies carried out by the author, in particular on the subject of anthropology.

From the time of her dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy*, Edith Stein tackled a subject-matter that would be central for the School of Phenomenology, that of 'otherness', the relation between a person's subjectivity and that of others and knowledge of others, preliminary to the taking up of any affective or ethical position. In this

⁶ E. STEIN, *Essays on Woman*, Washington 1996.

study, she traced, with respect to human subjectivity, the corporeal dimension as an indispensable instrument of communication, but also the dimension of the psyche and that of the spirit.

By proceeding from an analysis of the actions that characterise the human being, and by putting between parenthesis all that is taught by tradition, though not denying its value, she analysed these phenomena that present themselves to us as specific actions of the psyche and spirit.⁷ She grasped the essence of these actions, and came to the conclusion that the human being is constituted by corporeity, the psychic dimension and spirit. Phenomenological analysis confirmed that which classical philosophical currents had been teaching about the structure of the human being.

She read works from ancient and mediaeval times that allowed her as a phenomenologist to study the theme of essence, in particular Thomas Aquinas's pamphlet *De ente et essentia*. In this way she could confer a metaphysical foundation on essence itself, something which her teacher Husserl had not done.⁸

If we keep these brief facts in mind, we can understand some central points of her treatment of what can be called a "dual" anthropology, of which she says: "I am convinced that the species *humanity*" – the German word *Mensch* could be best translated as *human being*, – "embraces the double species man and woman; that the essence of the complete human being is characterised by this duality; and that the entire structure of the essence demonstrates the specific character".⁹

The difference between female and male is sustained together with the specific unity of the human being. Indeed, woman and man are human beings and in this consists their equality, but they are also differ-

⁷ Cf. A. ALES BELLO, *Fenomenologia dell'essere umano. Lineamenti di una fenomenologia al femminile*, Roma 1992.

⁸ Cf. E. STEIN, *Finite and Eternal Being: An Attempt to an Ascent to the Meaning of Being*, Washington 2002.

⁹ IDEM, *Essays on Woman*, op. cit., 187.

ent in the sense that: “There is a difference, not only in body structure and in particular physiological functions, but also in the entire corporeal life. The relationship of soul and body is different in man and woman; the relationship of soul to body differs in their psychic life as well as that of the spiritual faculties to each other”.¹⁰

It is important to establish in what this difference consists. This is a central point in order to find out in what way the life of each of them should proceed and, therefore, to intervene from the educational point of view. Edith Stein, briefly and succinctly, pointed out the basic points of distinction: “The feminine species expresses a unity and wholeness of the total psychosomatic personality and a harmonious development of faculties. The masculine species strives to enhance individual abilities in order that they may attain their highest achievements”.¹¹

Like every “thing” – and the term “thing” (Sache) should be taken in all its amplitude as “fact”, “event”, “reality” – the human being too has an essence, but in a specific case it is expressed in two ways. Therefore Edith Stein emphasised that we can speak of the essence of woman and the essence of man. She confirmed the fact that, although it is true in general that the human being is made up of body, psyche and spirit, each of these parts has different characteristics in the two sexes and their reciprocal relationship is specific to them. The fact that they are specific is also confirmed by a psychological analysis to which Edith Stein dedicated ample space. Through this it is possible not only to establish general elements that distinguish between the feminine and the masculine, but to arrive at identifying typologies and, finally, to grasp the singularity in their unrepeatable characteristics.

Edith Stein’s analysis extends, then, to the search for distinctive traits that involve the cognitive sphere, the affective sphere and intersubjective relations. A woman is intuitive about the concrete, the living

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 187-8.

and the personal, and has a special sensitivity in comprehending the specific value of an object. She embraces the spiritual life of others and wishes to bring humanity to its maximum perfection with its own expression through love that is ready to serve. She tends to carry out harmonious development of all her energies. A man has the drive to know, to take hold of known objects in order to enjoy them and to shape them according to his desires. Each of these activities, though, involves him to such an extent that he cannot harmonise everything. If he cultivates one, he has to leave aside the others, and this is because he has the tendency for high expenditure of some energies.

Based on this difference, Edith Stein pointed out the destiny of woman as well as of man, by developing an idea that Gertrud von Le Fort would also adopt – Edith Stein’s writings precede the book *The eternal Woman* published in 1934 – on the need to rethink the meaning of the feminine in relation to the masculine, in order to point to a balanced relationship between the two.

One of Edith Stein’s most interesting writings, contained in the book *Essays on Woman*, is about the *Vocations of Man and Woman*. She claims that the term *Beruf*, which in modern German means ‘profession’, should be brought back to its etymology which links it to “calling”. A call is not only of a social order, but is mostly of a religious nature because “finally, it is God Himself who calls”.¹²

The call, as we noted above, is already imprinted on human nature and can be placed in evidence through philosophical reflection and through an attentive study of history, but “God Himself declares it in the words of the Old and New Testament”.¹³

This last idea brings us to point out the multiplicity of methods in approaching the feminine and masculine question that were used by Edith Stein and pointed out in *Problems of Women’s Education*. In par-

¹² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹³ *Ibid.*

ticular there is the method of the natural sciences (special psychology of the elements), the method of the science of the soul (special individual psychology), the philosophical method and the theological method.

Her interest in multiple areas of knowledge and her competence in each of them is seen in her writings. We observe the position she took with regard to psychology and the human sciences with the intention of drawing them to their philosophical roots, from which it is very dangerous to remove them, as stated in *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*;¹⁴ her knowledge of political doctrines and the doctrine of the State, as seen in *An Investigation Concerning the State*;¹⁵ her significant description of reality given in *Finite and Eternal Being*,¹⁶ a writing that can be considered to be a sort of *Summa*, like those written in mediaeval times, in which she tackles metaphysical and theological questions.

With all of this knowledge and theoretical processing, together with didactic experience in the classroom every day, and with extraordinary attention to the social and political topics of her times, the feminine question is examined by Edith Stein with such completeness that this is perhaps a unique case in history of Christian anthropological study on woman and on man.

DUAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE MAGISTERIUM OF JOHN PAUL II

A milestone in anthropological groundwork on the feminine and the masculine is to be found in the magisterium of John Paul II. The very important apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the *Letter to Women*, the talks delivered at the general audiences from 1995 to 1996,

¹⁴ Cf. IDEM, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, Washington 1996.

¹⁵ IDEM, *An Investigation Concerning the State*, Washington 2007.

¹⁶ IDEM, *Finite and Eternal Being*, Washington 2002.

are all testimonies of a pastoral interest in women, and now they are a prescribed reference for the Catholic world.

Attention is directed firstly to women as having been historically and socially regarded as weaker and therefore discriminated against.

We could say that this attention helped to unravel knots and smooth out difficulties that had emerged over the centuries, and answers were given to ferments of secular culture and Christian movements.

The dominant topic is that of “reciprocity” between men and women and it is this that is leading the way to a definitive anthropological reassessment. The point of reference of this revision is the Gospel message. It has always been before everyone’s eyes, but it has not always been adequately received. The recognition of this fact is one of the amazing innovations in the position taken up by John Paul II.¹⁷

In a brief passage dedicated to women in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, the Pope is moved by a social and by a personal observation. In the first place, feminism is “a reaction to the lack of respect accorded each woman”.¹⁸ There is plentiful evidence in the Catholic Church that women have been respected and that it could not be otherwise, given the strong tendency towards Marian devotion. Secondly, attention given to the feminine is not only linked to the obligations of the Pope’s magisterium. He affirmed that: “Everything that I have written on this theme in *Mulieris Dignitatem* I have felt since I was very young, and, in a certain sense, from infancy. Perhaps I was also influenced by the climate of the time in which I was brought up – it was a time of great respect and consideration for women, especially for women who were mothers”.¹⁹

With regard to the first point, the Pope referred to a tradition that

¹⁷ L. ACCATTOLI, *Quando il Papa chiede perdono. Tutti i mea culpa di Giovanni Paolo II*, Milano 1997.

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, London 1994, 216.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

we have seen to be always present in the Christian Church until the reformation and then continued in the Catholic Church, according to which a woman as virgin and mother was held in high esteem. It may have been that the married state was therefore not so highly regarded, and for that reason it was extolled by the evangelical currents that opposed Catholicism. These occurrences lead us to further reflection regarding the emergence of feminism in Protestant countries where there was no Marian devotion. We could advance the hypothesis that letting this devotion fall away worsened the esteem for women in the ecclesial and social spheres. Of course we cannot hold that the feminine condition was optimum in Catholic countries due to the respect held there for Mary, but perhaps women felt protected because of it, as it was so important from the point of view of the religion-femininity relationship and they were, even if only formally, appeased. All of this calls us to open a chapter on femininity and religion, which I have discussed on another occasion,²⁰ and that finds extraordinary development in the works of John Paul II.

It is not possible to give a precise analysis of *Mulieris Dignitatem*. However, I think it would be appropriate to point out some aspects, and to give what is called in feminist theology a feminine reading of the Bible. Two points made about the Old Testament are particularly significant. One is the comment on the book of Genesis and its double version of the creation of man and woman. The other is about the anthropomorphism of biblical language.

From Edith Stein to Jacques Maritain and to feminist theologians, the two passages relating to the creation of human beings (*Gen* 1: 28 and 2: 18-25) have been the subject of lively discussion, especially in the effort to establish or otherwise their coherence. The Pontiff sorts out the question by emphasising that both passages show that: “both man

²⁰ Cf. A. ALES BELLO, *Sul femminile. Scritti di antropologia e religione*, ed. M. D’Ambra, Troina 2004.

and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image".²¹ Also in the second description, even if the language: "is less precise, and, one might say, more descriptive and metaphorical, closer to the language of the myths known at the time", it contains the idea that "the woman is another 'I' in a common humanity".²² This unequivocally established that both have their own dignity and they were created in reciprocal relationship. In this way a basis was given for the three instances that marked progress in feminine thought: equality, complementarity and reciprocity. We have seen how all of this can find its confirmation from the point of view of philosophical anthropology.

The second important point has to do with the anthropomorphism of biblical language. The accusation that the Bible was written and was being read according to masculine language arose with the first feminist movements in the nineteenth century in the United States, as we have said above.²³ The apostolic letter addresses this question by emphasising the limitations of anthropomorphic language: God is not properly either Father or Mother. Although in the Bible there are expressions that attribute to God paternal and maternal sentiments, what it wishes to express is: "the mystery of the eternal 'generating'. [...] In itself this 'generating' has neither 'masculine' nor 'feminine' qualities. It is by nature totally divine".²⁴

The situation of tension that exists between man and woman is a consequence of sin. Sin cannot be blamed on woman alone, which a superficial reading could imply, but it entails the responsibility of both. However, the sin that was committed brought about the subordination of women to men as a consequence of the imbalance brought about by the wrong choice made. Nevertheless, for Christians there is the great

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ We think of the book by E. CADY STANTON, *The Revising Committee. The Woman's Bible*, New York 1985.

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 6.

hope of the Redemption. The original order can be restored, and it has been restored by Jesus Christ through his teachings and actions.

In the marvellous twelfth section of *Mulieris Dignitatem* entitled, “They marvelled that he was talking with a woman”, John Paul II brought to light all the potential present in Jesus’ actions, not always seen by his contemporaries and not even by his followers, we could say, until the present day. “In the eyes of his contemporaries Christ became a promoter of women’s true dignity and of the vocation corresponding to this dignity. At times this caused wonder, surprise, often to the point of scandal: ‘They marvelled that he was talking with a woman’ (Jn 4: 27)”. The Pontiff emphasises the courageous response that women gave to Jesus’ approach, even to the point of defying the authorities and remaining at the foot of the cross, while the apostles, with the exception of John, moved away or denied him. Women were entrusted to be the witnesses of the Resurrection, in a social context in which women’s testimony had no value. They are also entrusted with the duty to prophecy: “‘To prophesy’ means to express by one’s words and one’s life ‘the mighty works of God’ (Acts 2: 11), preserving the truth and originality of each person, whether woman or man”.²⁵

The concept of person which is introduced here allows us to confirm a philosophical reflection that starts out from a direct vision of the human being and from an essential analysis of human characteristics, and that highlights not only the dimension of corporeity, but also the mental and especially the spiritual. It is true that Revelation is the ultimate term of comparison in searching for the truth, and it is also true that human beings can comprehend the significance of things around them and of themselves, and discover their potential. Although they recognise the limitations in their knowledge and capabilities, this is secondary, according to Saint Thomas. Otherwise, how could they take

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 16.

their destiny in hand, and how could they contribute to the development of creation?

From John Paul II's message there emerges a vital point for a philosophical study of the human being's unity and twofold nature. As we have said before, the Pope insists on the theme of the unity of the two. What does our experience tell us? It tells us that the other is another "I", but every "I" is characterised by a masculine and feminine connotation which is very important for an understanding of their personal singularity. It is certainly not without importance to be a man or to be a woman. We are one or the other under the profile of common humanity, and not because of the ability, potential and attitudes that characterise the male and the female and the way in which masculinity and femininity are expressed in each one.

In her convincing anthropological analysis that we mentioned above, Edith Stein leads us to accept the "unity of the two", to use the expression in the apostolic letter, without allowing one to prevail over the other, but to recognise each one's personal autonomy. It is only on this that we can base the reciprocal relationship that goes beyond complementarity as a motive, being present in the "reciprocal help", spoken of in Genesis (2: 20).

Maternity is the element that strongly characterises the feminine, and the femininity of soul that Edith Stein spoke of allows us to understand the value of consecrated life or lives in general that are not expressed only through biological motherhood. This is confirmed in the apostolic letter dedicated to the relationship between motherhood and virginity.

The philosophical value, as well as the theological, of John Paul II's message, allows us to accept the valid ideas from women's and feminist thought on women, and to integrate them in a basic analysis of the human being that makes a formulation of a dual anthropology essential.

Women founders and missionaries worldwide

GRAZIA LOPARCO, FMA*

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Women founders of religious congregations between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are personalities who made their mark on the social scene. This was a time of transformation in women's awareness that was brought about by multiple cultural factors. In order to understand the motive for their enterprising initiatives, we must probe for a deeper reason, to the inner personal calling at the source of an autonomous response that cannot be delegated to another person.

A quick look at a series of personal and institutional events prompts us to wonder what hermeneutic categories are used by religious congregations of sisters to interpret their origins and how they present their founders.

Internal bibliographies underwent a very positive development following the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council. The invitation sent to the congregations to return to their roots in order to undertake the required updating (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 2) encouraged them to set about restudying their own spirituality. Biographies had hitherto been more influenced by a hagiographic model that was intended to edify and therefore used sources selectively, rather than by a real historical interest that would be attentive to context.

A leap in quality, in several cases, was helped by more precise

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research. It was initiated in order to collect documentation for the processes of beatification and canonisation of the founders. It was also helped by the foundation of some centres for study and historical research, intended for the publication of sources and research. This interest revealed the precarious nature of the state of the documentation tied up in bundles or scattered in multiple archives, and the difficulty of putting them in order and making them accessible to scholars.¹

Various scientific conventions that were held with the involvement of scholars external to the congregations have brought to light several religious figures found within the historical and ecclesial framework. These conventions removed them from the isolation to which they had been assigned because of a unilateral portrayal that had been concerned about bringing to light the unicity of the contribution of the founder. Regarding the number of women founders involved and the consistency of their historical influence which was real but often not documented, there is regret for the considerable delay and the lack of sensibility towards investment of resources in order to have qualified research and historical studies.

The interest shown by scholars in women's history has brought to the surface aspects and abilities that were quite neglected by a traditional and rather spiritualistic vision of the founders. It has enriched the understanding of these women, by using the headings of subjectivity, leadership and financial enterprise, in the formulation of new models for women. On the contrary, a study that is purely linked to the suc-

¹ Cf. E. BOAGA, "La tutela e la gestione degli archivi dei religiosi: dalle esperienze storiche alle esigenze attuali", in: *Archiva Ecclesiae* 42 (1999), 25-62. In recent years an increase has been noted in publications of sources, especially in the sphere of education. Among the latest contributions: G. ROCCA, "Fonti per la storia dell'educazione femminile negli archivi degli istituti religiosi. Le molteplici possibilità di una ricerca (sec. XVI-XIX)", in: *Gli archivi per la storia degli Ordini religiosi. I. Fonti e problemi (secoli XVI-XIX)*, ed. M. GIANNINI – M. SANFILIPPO (*Studi di storia delle istituzioni ecclesiastiche*, 1), Viterbo 2007, 239-274.

cesses and victories of the founders, separated from their faith, would give a distorted and reductive image. The present bibliographic panorama reflects a range of historiographical successes, both in internal publications edited by the congregations, and in those entrusted to publishing houses.²

To avoid misunderstandings, we must insist that the history of women founders cannot be studied in a “separate” way from men founders. Interaction between them was naturally continuous, and is therefore simply an integral part of Church history. Nevertheless, we must recognise that women’s contribution, being outside the hierarchy, remains unappreciated or tied to stereotypes. This is from limitations imposed by ecclesiastical historiography, due to reasons quite similar to those of general historiography.

On the other hand, women’s history, which we recognise as a specific current although it cannot be isolated from general history, is opening up to the observation that these founders and religious sisters are women, marked by their origins, with a particular development of their subjectivity that was motivated and developed through faith. After initial research on prominent personalities in the mediaeval and modern ages, the congregations have drawn some interest as consistent groups of women gathered around a common project, with precise methods of leadership organisation, relations, and apostolic and social initiatives.³

² Cf. P. WYNANTS, “Les religieuses de vie active en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas, XIXe et XXe siècles”, in: *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 95 (2000) 3, 238-256; R. AUBERT, “Les nouvelles frontières de l'historiographie ecclésiastique”, in: *ivi*, 757-781.

³ A recent initiative of collaboration between researchers belonging to various Italian universities and members of the Italian society of women historians and religious members of the Coordination of Religious Historians (www.storicireligiosi.it) has allowed for a coming together of historiographical perspectives. Cf. *Per le strade del mondo. Laiche e religiose fra Otto e Novecento*, ed. S. BARTOLONI, Bologna 2007. Gaiotti, Fattorini and other women authors refer to the historiographical evolution in force in the area of women’s religious institutes. The contributions of Luigi Mezzadri and Marcella Farina in the *Rivista di Scienze dell'educazione*, summarise some aspects dealt with in the book.

On the basis of information of various kinds, we can quickly recall the context that brought about a multiplication of religious communities of women with simple vows, living outside the cloister and without income, hard-working and skilful in increasing the number of activities aimed at helping the poor and sick, children and adults, men and women. Through a combination of factors, some aspects were developed that became typical of religious congregations, conforming to the new demands of the apostolate.

The initiative of women founders took the form of dynamic proposals that were suited to specific areas of life and not to pre-established models. For this reason they had to adapt the institutional structure of women's consecrated life, with social consequences, in particular in connection with the conditions of contemporary women; ecclesiastical consequences, by a return to faith and religious practice; financial consequences through experimentation of a wide network of solidarity between the religious houses and the offer of common utility services at a much reduced cost; implicit cultural consequences, in the conception of persons and the care due to each one as a person, with the formulation of long-lasting experiences and processes.⁴

⁴ Cf. C. LANGLOIS, *Le catholicisme au féminin. Les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1984; L. SCARAFFIA, "Il cristianesimo l'ha fatta libera, collocandola nella famiglia accanto all'uomo" (from 1850 until *Mulieris Dignitatem*), in: *Donne e fede. Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, ed. L. SCARAFFIA – G. ZARRI, Roma-Bari 1994, 441-493; L. SCARAFFIA, "Fondatrici e imprenditrici", in: *Santi, culti, simboli nell'età della secolarizzazione*, ed. E. FATTORINI, Torino 1997, 479-493. For a historiographical view of religious life, after the pioneering work of G. MARTINA, "La situazione degli istituti religiosi in Italia intorno al 1870", in: VARIOUS AUTHORS, *Chiesa e religiosità in Italia dopo l'unità (1861-1878)*, I, Milano, *Vita e Pensiero* 1973, 194-335, see also G. ROCCA, "Contenuti e periodizzazione della storia della vita religiosa", in: *Antropologia e storia delle religioni. Saggi in onore di Alfonso M. di Nola*, ed. A. DE SPIRITO – I. BELLOTTA, Roma 2000, 147-182; on religious sisters in particular, see my book *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice nella società italiana (1900-1922). Percorsi e problemi di ricerca*, Roma 2002.

WHAT IS NEW IN WOMEN'S APOSTOLATE

The involvement of women in the French Revolution, on the barricades as well as in their works of charity and their defence of the sacramental practice of “non-sworn” priests, gradually brought about the awareness that women could be a potential force for the preservation of Christian structures in society. Their contribution did not have to be limited to the family, as was the custom, but could spread out to a much wider range of action. Meanwhile, the suppression and confiscation of monasteries at the time of Napoleon and in the liberal climate following the Restoration, notwithstanding the hardships, had restored a better image of consecrated life, purified of the privileges and the shadow of compulsion to take the habit.⁵

Many changes took place in the Church for its own reasons and not only for the inevitable reason of keeping up with events. It was also perceived that women's roles could be changed so that they could participate actively in the Church's life and mission.⁶ Women and the Church in the nineteenth century entered into a tacit alliance between losers. They were excluded from social-cultural and political visibility in view of their task of preserving and transmitting Christian values. Meanwhile secularisation grew as an affirmation of modernity, with models of individual success that were typically masculine.⁷

⁵ Cf. G. ROCCA, *Donne religiose. Contributo a una storia della condizione femminile in Italia nei secoli XIX-XX*, Roma 1992.

⁶ Cf. Y. TURIN, *Femmes et religieuses au XIX^e siècle. Le féminisme « en religion »*, Paris 1989.

⁷ Cf. M. CAFFIERO, “Dall'esplosione mistica tardo-barocca all'apostolato sociale (1650-1850)”, in: SCARAFFIA-ZARRI, *Donne e fede*, 327-373. P. GAIOTTI DE BIASE, *Vissuto religioso e secolarizzazione. Le donne nella “rivoluzione più lunga”*, Roma 2006; IDEM, “Da una cittadinanza all'altra. Il duplice protagonismo delle donne cattoliche”, in: G. BONACCHI – A. GROPPI, *Il dilemma della cittadinanza. Diritti e doveri delle donne*, Roma-Bari 1993, 128-165; P. GAIOTTI DE BIASE, “Donne, fede e modernità. L'asimmetria di genere nei processi della secolarizzazione”, in: *Bailamme. Rivista di spiritualità e politica* 27/5 (2001), 83-109; IDEM, “Protago-

Mother Madeleine Barat, founder of the Dames of the Sacred Heart (now the Society of the Sacred Heart), in 1840 could foresee a new role for women because of the way in which faith could transform their frailty: “The hope of salvation will be increasingly seen in the weaker sex. The men of our century are becoming women; transformed by faith, the women can become men”.⁸

In a European cultural climate more attentive to subjectivity, consecration as a response to a personal call was an opportunity for women to grow in autonomy with respect to the social traditions that were tied to subjection and family protection.⁹ Before their own conscience, women who were prepared to take a risk for faith learned to respond personally with decisions that could have public implications. At times they were not understood by their families, as choices in marriage often remained the prerogative of family projections and interests with little possibility of freedom of choice.

Spiritual life was the propelling force for the mission of many women. Through faith they became enterprising and resolute, often adopting original methods that may have been beyond the understanding of their times, in the Christian mould of “strong women”. In fact, the call to work in an increasingly secularised environment implied a willingness to adapt to specific demands, and not to maintain an attitude of nostalgia, polemics and apologetics, typical of those who are intransigent.

Many parish priests, confessors and spiritual directors facilitated the investment of energies in different fields of charitable work, spurred on by pastoral sensitivity, and sometimes advising against the cloister. The

nismo religioso ed emancipazione delle donne: una storia di lungo periodo”, in: *Per le strade del mondo. Laiche e religiose fra Otto e Novecento*, ed. S. BARTOLONI, Bologna 2007, 25-52.

⁸ Quotation from: J. RIVAUX, *Vie de la Révérende Mère Saint-Jean, née Jeanne Fontbonne*, s.l., 310.

⁹ Cf. M. FARINA, “Percorsi femminili di spiritualità nella storia del cristianesimo cattolico”, in: L. BORRIELLO – E. CARUANA – M.R. DEL GENIO – M. TIRABOSCHI, *La donna: memoria e attualità. II. Donna ed esperienza di Dio nei solchi della storia*, parte seconda, Città del Vaticano 2000, 5-146.

lack of cultural preparation and an even lower level of theological training of religious sisters, was a limitation in view of the demands of emerging modernity. However, in a certain sense it perhaps levelled out the way for more flexible commitment by favouring people who were recognised for their dignity, and not for theoretical motives that set idealistic and cultural alliances against each other.

At a time when men's religious practice was diminishing, especially in urban and industrialised areas, the religious sisters spontaneously merged with the people, in the places of daily life where social, economic and cultural transformations were taking place. By moving away from the old monastic model with solemn vows and cloistered life, the women founders opened up direct involvement in the apostolate. They could see clearly how some areas were closed to the clergy in a prejudicial way, while women could enter in a more informal way. With their hard-working and unarmed approach in charity, they had an effect on the quality of family ties, while maintaining a clear identity through the wearing of a religious habit.

The prevention, cure or rehabilitation of girls and women in "precarious" or "fallen" situations became newsworthy social themes during the nineteenth century that the religious sisters tried to address with the sensitivity and means at their disposal. They would often arrive before public services and they were able to reach places that were peripheral and neglected. Being at the centre of the social question that was tied to the impact of industrialisation, the women's apostolate was present filling the gaps in the old and new forms of poverty that escaped the attention of the liberal States. This was in spite of the fact that those States aimed at institutionalising aid and education, and at improving the professionalism of services that until then had been tied to charity.¹⁰ The growing competition with other initiatives also encour-

¹⁰ I shall not give specific bibliographical references here, as these topics can be found in the studies mentioned above and in the more recent historiography of several countries.

aged congregations to renew and improve their own activities, in order not to leave the field wide open to the philanthropic institutions of masonry, or those linked to socialism, which often offered training quite similar to that of the religious but with greater financial means at their disposal.

In response to the different kinds of poverty they observed, and taking these as calls to intervene, many women, far from feeling uninvolved socially and legally, opted for consecration as a suitable solution to a full time apostolate in which there was a new understanding of the traditional category of personal sanctification.¹¹

In the creation of religious institutes, the collaboration and formulation of a community experience allowed for an appreciation of the feminine capacity to “see” the needs of others. They allow their hearts to be touched, and so they stand up to the conditioning being imposed by their environment. They take on the mission of the Church, and find their inspiration in Mary and her spiritual motherhood as they go out to do their social charitable work, in situations where they are more exposed.¹²

“Eyes lowered” remained the icon of modesty, but when dealing with women, children, girls, orphans, the sick and emigrants, they had to have their eyes open. They had to understand in a different way how they could exercise asceticism and work towards a moral and social uplifting of consciences and preparation for social involvement. Women’s initiative

¹¹ An example is the case of Maddalena di Canossa who founded the Daughters of Charity after long discernment over the possibility of the cloistered life. See among other biographies, M. AIROLDI – D. TUNIZ, *Maddalena di Canossa. La carità è un fuoco che sempre più si dilata*, Cinisello Balsamo 2007.

¹² Cf. E. FATTORINI, “La religiosità femminile nel pontificato di Leone XIII”, in: *Per le strade del mondo. Laiche e religiose fra Otto e Novecento*, op. cit., 61-62; see also my contribution: “Cenni storici sull’ispirazione mariana in istituzioni educative del XIX secolo”, in: «Io ti darò la Maestra...». *Il coraggio di educare alla scuola di Maria*, ed. M. DOSIO – M. GANNON – M.P. MANELLO – M. MARCHI, Roma 2005, 241-262.

responded with courage to new needs. They renewed their methods and also stimulated canonical changes, given that the religious model of the old regime was no longer relevant. As their institutional works were subject to state laws, the founders realised that it was necessary to improve training of the personnel, both professionally and spiritually. They could see that opportunities and demands were changing.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The profession of vows in a way compatible with the legislation of liberal States required that innovations be sanctioned in the constitutions, especially regarding the vow of poverty. This was the profession of simple vows instead of solemn vows, their provisional nature being more in consonance with the climate of uncertainty. The nineteenth century foundations were supported by the Holy See as congregations of secular women living according to *more religiosarum*, but their variety of approach was reflected in the type of approval granted.¹³

With the *Methodus* of 1854, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars established the method of approval of new institutes by the Holy See, when they had gone beyond the diocesan level.¹⁴ The recognition

¹³ The *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione* (DIP, a cura di G. PELLICCIA – G. ROCCA, Edizioni Paoline, X voll.) has many entries describing the institutional changes and experiences encountered. For example, the entry for Religious Congregation, in: DIP II, col. 1563. The approval of a congregation uses specific formulae connected with the features of the institution, and through the different typologies of documents produced in a pre-established order, they reflect the state of official recognition in relation to the stage of development of the institute. In order to appreciate the variables in the history of diocesan and pontifical approvals of congregations, see J. TORRES, “Approvazione delle Religioni”, in: DIP I, col. 765-773, and also J.P. MÜLLER – J. TORRES, “Documenti pontifici di approvazione”, in: DIP III, col. 751-777, in particular 773-774 on the passage from the apostolic letter to the more modest decree of praise.

¹⁴ Cf. *Methodus*, in: *Collectanea in usum Secretariae Sacrae Congregationis Episcoporum et Regularium cura A. Bizzarri Archiepiscopi Philippensis Secretarii edita*, Romae, Ex Typographia Rev. Camerae Apostolicae 1863, 828-829. A specific study gives light to vari-

of the superior general was correlated with the prerogative of governance over people and things, the type of jurisdiction held by bishops and other ecclesiastics. The specific demands of the institutional works they managed gave rise to gradual change: they thought of having external religious sisters, who had more freedom of movement; they saw the need for contacts and collaboration with lay people; there was a gradual abandoning of total separation, as the boarders, for example, were allowed holidays with their families; they had to think of those needing assistance, especially sick men and older students in the schools who were no longer children.

The founders obtained institutional change by insisting on their ideas matured in prayer that suggested that the apostolate be organised according to the demands of the times. Besides, the sisters came from the social fabric and they knew it well without the mediation of training in a convent or the prerogatives of a tradition to defend, and so they were very willing to adapt. The apostolate began to be moved by consecration. There was a process of overcoming an intimistic vision of perfection so that they could be fully involved in encouraging adhesion to the Christian life through hands-on charity and gestures of care comprehensible to all.¹⁵

The first generation of women founders in Western Europe, at the time of the Restoration, mostly came from the well-off classes. They

ous canonical aspects: E. SASTRE SANTOS, *L'emancipazione della donna nei "novelli istituti": la creazione della superiora generale, il Methodus 1854* (Institutum Iuridicum Claretianum), Studi 5, Roma 2006. The same author has studied various aspects of the development, especially the juridical, of religious life: *La vita religiosa nella storia della Chiesa e della società*, Milano 1997.

¹⁵ Cf. B. MISNER, *"Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies": Catholic Women Religious in America 1790-1850*, New York - London 1988; R. MEIWES, *"Arbeiterinnen des Herrns". Katbolische Frauenkongregationen im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt/NewYork 2000; M. EWENS, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, New York 1978; M. EWENS, "Removing the Veil: the Liberated American Nun", in: R.R. RUETHER - E. MCLAUGHLIN [eds.], *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York 1979, 255-278.

mixed in high social circles and were culturally equipped. They included the marchioness Maddalena di Canossa,¹⁶ Leopoldina Naudet,¹⁷ Juliette Colbert the marchioness Falletti di Barolo who founded the Sisters of Saint Anne and other charitable communities to care for young people and women that took the names of the Daughters of Jesus the Good Shepherd and the Sisters of Saint Joseph; Teresa Eustochio Verzeri, founder of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, Marchioness Maria Maddalena Frescobaldi Capponi, founder of the Passionist Sisters, Rosa Gattorno founder of the Daughters of Saint Anne, and so many more. Some of them remained lay people, others became religious and superiors of communities and set out new paths of guidance, collaboration and education.

In combination with the passage to a certain social mobility, there were teachers and women from the middle and popular classes who became founders. They were often linked to third order groups or Marian parish associations, and they showed the enterprise of the social classes from which they came, or if they were connected to peasant and rural areas, they showed an openness to wider interests. I shall not name them here as the list would be far too long, grouped according to geographical and economic areas.¹⁸

In the same way as the founders, the members of the congregations increasingly reflected a form of “democratisation”.¹⁹ At the same time,

¹⁶ In addition to the bibliographies noted above, see also the recent publication: *I duecento anni della famiglia religiosa canossiana. Figlie della carità Serve dei poveri a servizio della Chiesa e del mondo intero 1808-2008*, Cuneo 2007-2008, 2 vols.

¹⁷ Cf. A. VALERIO, “Da donna a donne: Leopoldina Naudet e l’educazione femminile agli inizi dell’Ottocento”, in: *Santi, culti e simboli*, ed. E. FATTORINI, 515ff.

¹⁸ In Italy the foundations were earlier and more numerous in the northern areas, while towards the end of the century they were common in the South, particularly in Sicily; see: M.T. FALZONE, *Le Congregazioni religiose nella Sicilia dell’Ottocento*, Caltanissetta-Roma 2002.

¹⁹ Cf. C. LANGLOIS, *Le catholicisme au féminin. Les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIX^e siècle*, Paris 1984.

some institutes maintained a system of two classes of sisters. In one way this was a heritage from the monastic model, and in another it responded to the demands of the apostolate. At times this was connected to the level of instruction and preparation of members, but they did not wish to exclude others who were less gifted intellectually, but skilled in other fields.

In institutes where this difference was not included, sometimes the substitution of dowries with “equivalent dowries” which referred to professional skills or qualifications, demonstrated the assimilation of social change in action. This pointed to the skills and personal resources more than to revenue, and was more evident from the moment that new institutes were of active life and the communities supported themselves with their own work.

FROM PLACES OF ORIGIN TO THE MISSIONS

With centralisation and communications, awareness grew in the nineteenth century of the universality of the Church and its mission. In the space of a few years, many women founders moved their institutes out far from the place of origin, even though they disposed of few resources. This entailed uncertainties about the possibility of bishops attempting to control them. For this reason they were quick to request pontifical approval, which means direct dependence on the Holy See. For its part, the Holy See put measures of precaution in force by means of cardinal protectors.²⁰ It established the duration of terms of office of leadership, although the superior generals had often been assigned to that office for life. It also specified the support of general and provincial councils, and the request for periodic reports to be presented to the

²⁰ Cf. “Cardinale protettore”, in: *DIP* II, 276-280.

Sacred Congregation concerning people and things, and financial and structural data.

A certain collegiality of leadership for institutional works that were extended in an international network was unthinkable at the public level for women alone, whereas for ecclesiastical authority it was a way of guaranteeing good governance on the part of these women, and of protecting the congregations from the feared inadequacy of just one superior. In fact it sometimes brought about a more participative leadership. This partially eased the oligarchic perception that was due to the centralisation of the new institutes that planned the transfer of personnel and financial solidarity, and it made for a more co-responsible mission environment.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the constitution *Conditae a Christo*²¹ (1900) and the Complementary Norms²² (1901) recognised religious sisters with simple vows as being real religious. It imposed perpetual profession after a period of temporary vows, and juridical separation of women's institutes from their corresponding men's branch. This encouraged initiative and financial development, if the superiors managed to avoid the risks of careless administration, uncertainty regarding spiritual development, the legislative perils for the foundation and the management of the institutional works. The 1917 Code of Canon Law regulated religious life as the price of recognition. This could be perceived by the juridical tone of the constitutions that the congregations had to standardise after 1901. One effect probably connected with this development was the rigidity of several superior generals in their role of responsibility, and various sisters had recourse

²¹ Cf. LEO XIII, Apostolic Constitution *Conditae a Christo*, 8 December 1900, in: *Acta Sanctae Sedis XXXIII* (1900-1901), 341-347.

²² Cf. SACRA CONGREGATIO EPISCOPORUM ET REGULARIUM, *Normae secundum quas*, 28 June 1901, in: L. RAVASI, *De Regulis et Constitutionibus Religiosorum*, Roma-Tournai-Paris 1958, 188-226.

to the Holy See to complain that sometimes they behaved like authoritarian tyrants instead of like mothers.

The communities, on the basis of their work, with income relative to fees, with contracted salaries with conventions and especially with the control of expenses by adopting an austere style of life, created real possibilities for social and moral improvement for many people who were recipients of their care, not only through immediate assistance.²³ They recognised in illiteracy and lack of education a decisive cause of the degradation and material and moral misery. The real revolution was implemented for women through instruction being made accessible to the lower classes.²⁴

Joan Antida Thouret, and her foundation of Sisters of Charity, Marina Videmari and the Marcelline Sisters, Vincenza Gerosa and Bartolomea Capitanio who founded the Sisters of Charity of Lovere known as “of the child Mary”, Maria Domenica Brun Barbantini in Lucca, Paola Frassinetti who founded the Sisters of Saint Dorothy, Domenica Mazzarello who co-founded the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and Caterina Volpicelli and the Servants of the Sacred Heart in Naples, are some of the initiators of influential foundations. They were attentive to the educational dimension of the working classes through formal and informal means, specialised according to categories of pupils and girls, kinds of environment and social customs.

The sisters used humble firmness to prevail over ingrained preju-

²³ On the financial solutions adopted by the congregations, we can now find useful publications. Cf. G. ROCCA, “Le strategie anticonfisca degli istituti religiosi in Italia dall’Unità al Concordato del 1929: appunti per una storia”, in: *Clero, economia e contabilità in Europa. Tra Medioevo ed Età contemporanea*, ed. R. DI PIETRA – F. LANDI, Roma 2007, 226-247.

²⁴ Cf. my essay on “Gli istituti religiosi femminili e l’educazione delle donne in Italia tra Otto e Novecento”, in: *Seminarium* 44 (2004), 1-2: “Gli Istituti religiosi e la scuola cattolica nella storia”, 209-258. The whole volume examines the subject in the various geographical areas and historical periods.

dices that were common among liberals and ecclesiastics regarding the inappropriateness of allowing women access to writing and culture. It was their mission and not any demands for rights that became the propelling force that placed them at the vanguard of women in several fields like education, mobility of place and occupation, dialogue with officials, activities with finances, and the extension in their range of interests and action beyond the local and domestic level.

Greater self-awareness showed that the raising of women's conditions brought with it duties regarding family, society and Church, and therefore called for personal improvement for the advantage of all. In this way the exercise of virtue won over the dreaded frailness and weakness.

While the State institutionalised welfare, the socially "useful" apostolate made use of the work of the sisters, more than that of charity and the old styles that did not upset the *status quo*. The sisters set to work with proposals that sometimes involved other people, both lay and priests. At the same time, especially at the start of the twentieth century, they accepted invitations from women's associations, patronage, and entities that requested their collaboration in order to give stability and continuity to initiatives that they were organising. In this way they became employees bound by conventions in which they agreed to reciprocal duties and rights. Controls were put in place, but sometimes they could not avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.

In this way the religious life was no longer separation from the world, though at times it was longed-for as a possibility for silence, but it was more an incentive to "penetrate" the milieus in which religious practice was not observed and coercive methods were no longer in use. Attentive charity to people, and vigilant and providential care, became the preferred language to speak about God in a special way, not so much doctrinal as concrete, so that the terrifying judgement preached during the novenas gave way to mercy experienced in more human actions.

There was acknowledgment of new authority in the faith, with the feminine touches of witness which looked to the prototype of the strong woman to acquire credibility, instead of being hindered by the prejudices present in women themselves about their own capacity.

Ecclesial commitment became a reason to open up to universality, so that migratory movements found the sisters willing to go to faraway countries to help their emigrant co-nationals, of whom it was said had lost their faith on the ocean. To give a few examples: Maria Mazzarello wanted to learn Spanish and searched the map to identify the missions in South America. Frances Cabrini sailed the ocean many times. She used the most modern means of communication and used a managerial mentality fitting for the missions in the United States.²⁵

The women founders were attentive to the needs of their neighbours, but also of those who were far away. They put a network of solidarity in place among the communities, and they worked hard to collect funds to sustain the propagation of the faith in mission territories.

The centralised leadership had the task of devising ways of communication in order to ensure the unity of the institute and a sense of belonging that would overcome the distance between their houses. This is how they began to make journeys to visit the communities, their institutional works, the benefactors and the local authorities. They sent circular letters to speak out on topics of organisation, spirituality and ascetics, in addition to personal correspondence. They oversaw to make sure that they shared the same rules, practices of piety and books for spiritual reading, even the style of the buildings to reflect a spirit in a homogenous way.

Financial centralising reflected the idea of the institute being a large family to be administered. This facilitated gestures of solidarity between houses and provinces which went towards strengthening their institu-

²⁵ Cf. L. SCARAFFIA, *Francesca Cabrini. Tra terra e cielo*, Cinisello Balsamo 2003.

tional works that were undergoing difficulties, helping to develop the construction of their own buildings, and the completion of very many undertakings managed on behalf of local entities and administrations. All of this conditioned the number of sisters accepted and sometimes their apostolate.

Because of the need for mobility and professional competence, study and the transfer of communities and jobs were means of personal improvement in order to serve the projects of the Institute. In fact, they were also a lever towards opening up mentally and culturally, and to the acquisition of expertise and relational skills; of efficiency in the institutional works and appreciation of experience; of exchange that was far superior to that present in the society and classes of origin of the majority of the sisters. In particular, responsibility was an opportunity for growth, cultivated in a different way, strengthened by the need for cultural preparation in order to manage projects at the level of the demands of the times.

TO CONCLUDE

The emergence of religious congregations marked a new stage in women's enterprise in the Church and in society, because of the sisters' initiative to be immersed directly in the midst of the poverty of society and of women, and thereby changing the image of religious life as such. The first feminist *élites* began the struggle to emerge from submission to men and tried for a long time to achieve recognition of parity. In the Church the sisters experienced a form of emancipation that brought them to the forefront in various fields with respect to other women, without having to claim rights, but rather through taking on responsibilities and services to people, with a civil sense that was developed through the channels of faith, more than from laws from which they were excluded.

When the social isolation of religious sisters was superseded, which happened when separation came between Church and States taken over by liberalism, the choice to “be present” motivated the founders to draw up agreements and to open communities with a number of sisters lower than the minimum requested by the Holy See. In the same way they also accepted the collaboration of associations and individuals, through the initiative of either, for the sake of a common goal, while striving to preserve their own identity and specific style of action.

The enterprise of women founders in the ecclesial framework is not an exception at the level of principle, in the sense that Christianity has always recognised the equal dignity of women and men, even though it suffered all the conditioning of inculturation in taking on its social, cultural and institutional consequences.

With regard to women founders of religious congregations in general, we can ask how much their experience has enriched the Church, not only in daily life, but more profoundly in the public expression of its mission in the world. They received trust and trials, and in some way they managed to forge their place in the apostolate. They did not ask for acknowledgement, except that consistent with their mandate. This made them courageous and docile at the same time so that they could respond personally and creatively to a call of evangelical love expressed in service.

A new way of being Doctors of the Church

Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Thérèse of Lisieux

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1. INTRODUCTION: A NEW STEP FORWARD IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH, WOMEN DOCTORS

In 1970, Paul VI conferred the title of Doctor of the Church on Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. This was a significant step forward in the history of the Church, and yet it was a natural progression in the course of ongoing evolution.

In the early Church there were definitely some women who publicly exercised the role of teaching, to the extent that they could speak of the “apostolic role of women”. Quite early on they were deprived of this role, not for any reasons of principle,¹ but for the particular circumstances of their historical-cultural environment, including the lack of

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¹ Cipriani wrote: “The history of the Church has always recorded great women. Although they did not have hierarchical positions, they carried out wonderful work [...] including in the field of doctrine: we think of Teresa of Avila. There is spiritual parity and that of moral dignity that Christianity has claimed right from the beginning between men and women. In Christ there is neither ‘slave nor free’, nor even ‘male or female’ (*Gal 3: 29*)” (S. CIPRIANI, *Le epistole di San Paolo*, Assisi 1965, 652). Text published in: *Sacra pro Causis Sanctorum Congregatione. Cardinali Acadio M. Larraona, Relatore, Urbis et Orbis Concessionis Tituli Doctoris et extensionis eiusdem tituli ad universam ecclesiam necnon officii et missae de communi doctorum virginum in honorem S. Teresiae Abulensis Virginis Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum Parentis*, Romae 1969, *Informatio Patroni*, 5 (S. Rituum Congr. Archivum n. H 51/4). From here on the *Positio* will be cited as CTDTA.

preparation of some, the role of women being too centralised in the gnostic sects, and male reactions. Saint Paul's pronouncement began to be repeated: "*mulieres in ecclesiis taceant*" (cf. 1 Cor 14: 34), and Tertullian denied women the right to teach, the *ius docendi*. Some time later the teachings of several remarkable nuns like Saint Hildegard, Saint Mathilde and Saint Gertrude, received recognition by their contemporaries and by posterity. Nevertheless, even thinkers like Abelard who had high esteem for women, remained "anti-feminist" in the doctrinal area. In the thirteenth century, the great period of scholastic theology, the masters posed the question concerning whether a woman, preaching or teaching, could be a qualified Doctor, and they replied negatively.² This situation was prolonged until the pontificate of Pius XI. Until then it was still a sort of veto that seemed to be unsurmountable, and was expressed by the formula: *Obstat sexus!* It actually seemed that women could not be conferred with the title Doctor because of an excessively literal interpretation of Saint Paul's words.³ However, the profound social changes regarding the role of women in society and their influence on the life of the Church, the renewal brought about by

² Cf. J. LECLERCQ, "Deux nouveaux Docteurs de l'Eglise", in: *La vie spirituelle* 52 (1970), vol. 123, n. 575, 138-140. We keep in mind "on the one hand, the concept of Father-Doctor of the Church, attributed by the common voice of the people, to saints-pastors of certain metropolises, for the special merit acquired in the defence of holy doctrine at Ecumenical Councils or at times of ideological evolution (4th to 7th centuries) (the patristic doctorate); on the other hand, the official proclamation, from the Holy See, of the doctorate of some eminent people not only for their holiness but for the excellence of their holy doctrine, in vigour from the second half of the 16th century until now" (TARCISIO M. PICCARI, O.P., "Il Dottorato della Chiesa e il magistero carismatico di S. Caterina da Siena" in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7 febbraio 1968, 5).

³ When Paul VI decided to proclaim Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena Doctors of the Church, he asked the Congregation, then called the Congregation of Rites, to prepare a special study in order to confirm him in his decision. The work that opened the way to the proclamation of holy women Doctors was published in the S. Rituum Congregatio, *Positio peculiaris super dubio an titulus et cultus Doctor Ecclesiae tribui possit sanctis Mulieribus, quae sanctitate ac esimie doctrina ad comune Ecclesiae bonum magnopere contulerant*, Typis Poliglottis Vaticanis, 1967.

Vatican II on the subject, the distinction between hierarchical gifts and charismatic gifts,⁴ the re-evaluation of mysticism as a way of deepening into the mystery, were all elements that helped to overcome the difficulty of sex. Finally, official recognition was given to some women by granting them the qualification that the people of God had already in so many ways spontaneously attributed to them.

By proclaiming the saints Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena to be Doctors, Paul VI, according to and in consequence of the principle of parity between men and women, was not simply performing an act of administration, but was making a concrete gesture of official promotion of women in the Church. Women could teach, not because of an act of condescension, but because of their right, having the same title as the male Doctors of the Church.

The Pope made it clear that women – although not given hierarchical ecclesial functions of magisterium and ministry – were not called to a secondary role, but to a sublime mission among the people of God: “Having come in to be part of the Church through Baptism, woman partakes of the common priesthood of the faithful. This enables and obliges her ‘to profess before men the faith received from God through the Church’ (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11). So many women have reached the highest peaks in such profession of faith, to the point that their words and writings have given light and guidance to their brethren”.⁵

Without making explicit reference to the teaching mission that women could recover in the Church, Paul VI pointed to the light of

⁴ The *Positio* on the doctorate of Saint Teresa not only quotes the words of Saint Paul about women having to keep silent in Church, but also the words of the prophet Joel (3: 1-5) that announced that the Holy Spirit would descend on all and that the sons and daughters of Israel would prophecy (*Acts* 2: 17-18) (cf. CTDTA, *Informatio Patroni*, 5). In this way it was confirmed with Scripture that the Holy Spirit can pour the charismatic gifts on all believers.

⁵ PAUL VI, Homily on the occasion of the proclamation of Saint Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church (27 September 1970), in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 October 1970.

truth and wisdom that the faithful received from Teresa and put into service, and – when speaking of Catherine – he observed how religious and prelates, teachers and theologians, were “illuminated with the light that emanated from her soul, from her intelligence and advice” far beyond the borders of her country.⁶

The conferring of the title of Doctor on these women not only brought them new importance in the liturgy, because of the celebration of an office in keeping with further confirmation of their sanctity of life, but above all the recognition of the eminence of their doctrine, especially with regard to their teaching ability. John Paul II saw in this event an authentic “sign of the times”, as he wrote in *Mulieris Dignitatem*.⁷

The conferral of the title on Thérèse of Lisieux, the third and latest woman Doctor of the Church, followed a slightly different path. For Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila, their reputation for holiness, the eminence of their doctrine and the extraordinary influence they had on the life of the Church, already evident to their contemporaries, was never questioned. In the case of Thérèse of Lisieux, she was a young woman in contemplative life, as stated in the *Positio*, a girl who lived the most complete “ordinariness” without extraordinary mystical phenomena, like those of Teresa of Avila, nor was she active in the public ecclesiastical and civil life of her times, like Catherine. Above all, Thérèse of Lisieux had not composed any theological treatise. She

⁶ Cf. IDEM, Apostolic Letter *Mirabilis Ecclesia Deus. Sanctae Catharinae Senensi Titulus Doctoris Ecclesiae Universalis Defertur* (4 October 1970). Moreover, the *Positiones* regarding the conferring of the title of Doctor on Teresa and Catherine of Siena often refer to their quality of being “teachers” and to the nature, value and perpetuity of their “teaching” (see for example: CTDTA, *Eminentia doctrinae: ratio theologica ad eam iudicandam*, 91ff; *Sacra Rituum Congregatione*. Em. Card. Michaelae Browne, Relatore, *Urbis et Orbis Concessionis Tituli Doctoris et extensionis eiusdem tituli ad universam ecclesiam necnon officii et missae de communi doctorum virginum in honorem S. Catharinae Senensis Virginis. Terti Ordinis S. Dominici*, 14 October 1969, *Lettere postulatorie*, 467-517 (S. Rituum Congr. Archivum n. C7/1). From here on the *Positio* will be cited as CTDCS.

⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 1.

remained, we could say, hidden in the Carmelite convent in Normandy. Her sisters in religion, moreover, did not see anything special about her. At the time of her canonisation there were objections with regard to her holiness. Her doctrine was also an object of some reservations because some thought that it did not have the characteristics of an “ eminent ” doctrine.⁸ We actually have only a few autobiographical manuscripts, letters addressed mostly to her family and poetry with certainly none of the incomparable beauty of the compositions of Saint John of the Cross. On what basis could they have conferred on Thérèse of Lisieux the title of Doctor? On 19 October 1997, after careful analysis, the Church recognised the eminence of the teaching of the young Carmelite, her depth and the wise synthesis that she had achieved,⁹ and proclaimed her Doctor, as they had done with the two elder sisters and not with less reason.¹⁰

⁸ “ There was no lack of people who were reluctant to accept that a young Carmelite sister, even though a saint and loved by all, could be worthy to be placed beside the Doctors of the Church with a level of doctrine like Augustine, Leo the Great, John Chrysostom or Thomas Aquinas, or to share the same title as her teachers Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross ” (J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, OCD, “ Santa Teresa di Gesù Bambino ‘Dottore della Chiesa’. La sua eminente dottrina ”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 October 1997).

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Divini Amoris Scientia. Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face Is Proclaimed a Doctor of the Universal Church* (19 October 1997), no. 7.

¹⁰ The study leading up to the conferral of the title of Doctor on Thérèse of Lisieux took 65 years (1932-1997). Many theologians, bishops and cardinals requested that she be declared Doctor, basing this on the extraordinary influence of her doctrine and the eminently evangelical innovation of her message. They included Von Balthasar, Journet, Congar, Daniélou, Lustiger, Moreira Neves, Martini (cf. *Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum*. Prot. 2168. *Urbis et Orbis Concessionis Tituli Doctoris Ecclesiae Sancta Teresiae A Iesu Infante et a Sacro Vultu – Moniale Professae Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum in Monasterio Lexoviensi*, Cabellione 1997, Chapitre 2: *Histoire du Doctorat de S. Thérèse de Lisieux*, 51ff (Sacra Congr. Pro Causis Sanctorum Archivium A 6°/ 23). From here on the *Positio* will be cited as CTDETI.

2. A NEW WAY OF BEING DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

Mulieris Dignitatem, the apostolic letter on the dignity of women, tells us that the human being is fulfilled only in the dual complementarity of the sexes: “male and female he created them” (*Gen* 1: 27). Men and women have a common humanity and dignity and each of them expresses it and carries it out in the way that is proper to them, enriching each other in the process. The eminent doctrine of the three women Doctors therefore offers a specific contribution to the ecclesial magisterium.

On the occasion of the conferral of the title on Catherine of Siena, and later on that of Thérèse of Lisieux, some clarifications were made on the nature of their doctrine in order to explain the basis for such a decision. It seemed appropriate to specify that their teaching, although not having the same characteristics as those of the Fathers or previous Doctors, still deserved to be considered “eminent doctrine”.

As regards the mystic from Siena, Paul VI explained that in her doctrine “we shall certainly not find the apologetic vigour and the theological boldness which marks the works of the great lights of the ancient Church both in East and West”, nor “the lofty speculations which belong to systematic theology and which made the Doctors of the scholastic middle ages immortal, but “her infused wisdom, that is to say, lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and the mysteries of the faith [...]. That assimilation was certainly favoured by most singular natural gifts, but it was also certainly something prodigious, due to a charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit, a mystic charism”.¹¹ These last words, that emphasise the infused nature of her

¹¹ PAUL VI, Homily at the ceremony proclaiming Saint Catherine to be Doctor of the Church at Saint Peter’s Basilica (4 October 1970), in: *L’Osservatore Romano* (English edition), 15 October 1970.

doctrine, were also applied to Thérèse of Lisieux,¹² and therefore her relatively few writings, of a familiar and pedagogical nature, could be compared with the articulated writings of the other Doctors.¹³

With regard to Teresa of Avila, her fame as “Mother of the spiritual”, as a grand master of the mystical life, as well as numerous titles with which she has been honoured since the seventeenth century,¹⁴ have not made comparisons necessary. However, even for her there was something special noted about her teachings. In the homily for the conferral of the title of Doctor on the saint from Avila, Paul VI wondered: “From where did the wealth of her doctrine come to Teresa? Undoubtedly from her intelligence and her cultural and spiritual training, from her sensitivity, from her habitual and intense ascetical discipline, from her contemplative meditation, in a word, from her response to grace; received in a soul that was extraordinarily rich and well prepared for the practice and experience of prayer”. He added:

Is this the only source of her ‘eminent doctrine’? Should we not notice in Saint Teresa that there are acts, facts and states that do not come from her, but that were received by her, that are therefore sustained and passive, mystical in the true sense of the word, so that we must attribute them to the extraordinary action of the Holy Spirit?”¹⁵

So, the writings of these saints show us a different approach to

¹² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Divini Amoris Scientia*, no. 7.

¹³ “We certainly should not look here for a structured corpus of doctrine as in the case of other Doctors” (J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, “Santa Teresa di Gesù Bambino ‘Dottore della Chiesa’”, *op. cit.*).

¹⁴ “Since the 17th century the most learned Spanish scholars have called her: ‘angelic Doctor’, ‘most clear Doctor of the Church’, ‘Doctor of celestial intelligence’, ‘Doctor who graduated from the university of experience’, ‘prodigious Doctor’, ‘Doctor who is so far unique in the Church’, ‘sweet Doctor of souls’, ‘Doctor of Sacred Scripture’” (cf. CTDTA, *Litterae Postulatoriae ad Summum Pontifice directe*, Letters of the Pontifical University of Salamanca, 1 December 1967, 35).

¹⁵ PAUL VI, Homily at the ceremony proclaiming Saint Teresa of Avila to be Doctor of the Church (27 September 1970, in: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 4 October 1970).

human and divine reality. Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Thérèse of Lisieux – two Carmelites and one third order Dominican, from different countries (Spain, Italy and France), living in different centuries (fourteenth, sixteenth and nineteenth) that were marked by serious ecclesial crises and/or social change – have one feature in common: their way of living the faith, of making theology and communicating their doctrine as only a woman and a woman mystic can do. In short, a different way of being Doctors.

2.1. A doctrine rooted in totality of life

The three saints are not trained theologians. They did not attend any university, nor did they achieve academic degrees, but they present in their lives and in their works an admirable synthesis between their humanity and the divine, mystical gifts. The substance of their doctrine comes from an intimate relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, their Spouse and only Master. Gifts of wisdom and knowledge, fruits of the Spirit, illumine their writings. Their doctrine and these gifts imply a total involvement of their whole being, a unitary existential synthesis between the unmistakable imprint of their human personality and the light and fire of God. It is from this interior unity, human-divine, that their doctrine is born, a theology rooted in heart and mind, that takes hold of their soul completely. Their intelligence, will, feelings and emotions are filled with divine love, a fervent charity that becomes light and wisdom, the wisdom of divine and human things. With Teresa, Catherine and Thérèse, we see that it is true that only great love – divine love that purifies and makes human love divine – can make profound knowledge of the other possible.

Beyond their differences in character, these mystics each had a heart burning with divine fire, tender, courageous, desiring to love God and neighbour to the extent of total self giving. Catherine discovered the source of love in the Word incarnate and especially in Christ crucified.

She saw the adorable blood of the Son of God flow continuously for the redemption of humankind, and this spurred her on to work without pause for the salvation of all, to the extent that she earned the name “mamma” from her disciples.¹⁶ Teresa of Avila was also energetic and passionate, and loved Christ deeply, the Lord of her soul and her only Good, a Friend always at her side, and through whom she could overcome all kinds of obstacles. The great mystic is an understanding mother who is full of tenderness, in particular for her Carmelite daughters. At the same time she is a cheerful companion who is generous and charming. We can say the same about Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Her tender heart that yearned for love was capable of boundless love for Jesus and for others. She could create around her an atmosphere of trust, fraternal friendship, and of maternal attention and dedication.¹⁷

The three saints also show a clear and deep intelligence, and a good level of culture, but this does not mean that they were “intellectuals”.¹⁸

¹⁶ Among the better known facts about the life of Catherine is the tenderness and courage she showed towards Nicolò di Toldo when he was being executed. Catherine recounted in the famous letter number 273 to Friar Raimondo of Capua the story of the conversion and death of that young man condemned to death for political reasons, and how she sustained him until the moment of his beheading. Robert Fawtier, who marked a turning point in historical studies on Catherine of Siena in the twentieth century, put the execution of Nicolò di Toldo in doubt. We must point out that Fawtier’s hyper-critical attitude regarding the hagiographic sources that he himself used, prevented him from conducting a correct reading of them. Since then, specialists have been dedicated to researching documents regarding this personage both in Perugia and in Siena, and they have found numerous confirmations of Catherine’s story.

¹⁷ “In formation she knew how to create a family atmosphere, a climate of reciprocal trust and willingness to listen to the novices. She did not omit correction when it was necessary, and she could speak the truth with gentleness and firmness. Above all, she taught them how to discover God in everything and to live in love. She urged them to integrate everything in the light of God’s love: affectivity, personal qualities, and positive and negative aspects” (CTDETH, Chap. 12: *Actualité de la Doctrine de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux*, 562).

¹⁸ Catherine of Siena was unlettered, but that is not synonymous with “ignorant”. Although she only learned to read around 1366 and to write at the time of the *Dialogue*, at about the age of thirty, from the time of her adolescence she had received a cultural education with the Dominicans. She was fascinated with Saint Dominic, from whom she “took the

They were able to perceive reality in a completely different way. They thirsted for knowledge and truth, and were not content with pure theory. They allowed themselves to be guided by their keen power of observation and by a surprisingly practical spirit that showed them to have intelligence that was made more perceptive by love, disposed to comprehend people's inner being. Catherine's numerous letters that are addressed to very different people, are eloquent testimony of her way of penetrating the hidden depths of her interlocutors. Her extraordinary capacity for psychological intuition, illumined by grace and personal charisms, allowed her to bring the deceptions of the passions to light and to move people's will to do good.¹⁹ It was similar with the "two Teresas". They were gifted with a keen power of introspection and a deep knowledge of the psyche and the human spirit. Teresa of Avila was a master of the interior life, and Thérèse of the Child Jesus was also an excellent guide for the novices entrusted to her. They obtained from her comprehension and comfort, but above all a profound reading of their souls.²⁰

office of the Word", according to Catherine's own words. G. Cavallini said: "Any page of Catherine's reveals how she has a vast store of sacred culture which goes from the Bible to the works of Cavalca, as well as a solid and clear theological training" ("Echi della stampa" [1970-1980], in: *Ave Maria*, special number: 25th anniversary of the Doctorate conferred on Saint Catherine of Siena [1970-1995], LVII [1995], nos. 4-5, 56). Teresa of Avila was a great reader from the time she was very young, having at her disposition her father's excellent library. She went on to read the great authors, including Saint Augustine, and the spiritual works of many of her contemporaries. She studied the best Spanish theologians and well known famous and holy people of her times. As regards Thérèse of Lisieux, emphasis was given to her bright intelligence, her capacity for reflection from the time she was very young, as well as her great aptitude for reading, science, history and especially for the Mystery of God (cf. CTDETH, Chap. 4: *La personalità de S. Thérèse de Lisieux*, 90). II *Manuel du Chrétien* – which contained the *Imitation of Christ*, in addition to the Psalms and the New Testament – and the works of Saint John of the Cross were basic spiritual nourishment for her.

¹⁹ Cf. A. ROYO MARÍN, *Tre donne sante Dottori della Chiesa. Teresa d'Avila, Caterina da Siena, Teresa di Lisieux*, Cinisello Balsamo 2007, 168.

²⁰ Regarding the novices, Thérèse confessed to Mother Maria di Gonzaga: "Nothing escapes my eyes; I am frequently astonished at seeing so clearly" (*Story of a Soul. A Study Edition Prepared by Mark Foley, OCD*, Washington DC 2005, 380).

This ability to comprehend the personal dimension also applies to their relationship with God, to Jesus, and to the Church. The Trinity is not an abstract concept for them. It is the experience of a living relationship with the divine Persons. Jesus is the beloved Spouse who has spilled his blood for them. They give their lives to him and want to heal his wounds. The Church is not simply a system of thought or an institution, but “firstly and essentially a living family, of faces known and loved”.²¹

The doctrine of these mystics therefore stems from their human and divine wealth. In their words and writings they were able to transmit not only the splendour of divine wisdom, but also the features of their interior world: the intuition, ductility, depth of thought, fine sensitivity, warmth and tenderness of feelings, and even sense of humour, all transfigured by the light and fire of God, with particular attention to people as individuals.²² On the whole, they show a different, special way of living, perceiving, and communicating the divine and human, the world and history, and a remarkable ability to adhere to the concrete, the individual and life.

2.2. Theology as witness of life

The doctrine of these mystics is so rooted in life that it not only finds its source in life but also the contents. They teach what they experience and communicate themselves. They do not combat heresies, nor do they write in order to publish their studies, and they do not try to resolve any theoretical questions.²³ Neither did they intend to write books. As we said about Thérèse of the Child Jesus, in their writings

²¹ “Dalla commemorazione del cardinale Gabriele Garrone”, 29 October 1970, in: *Ave Maria*, 51.

²² JOHN PAUL II observed: “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” (Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 18).

²³ Teresa of Avila actively participated in doctrinal discussions only when they dealt with questions touching on life, and she did so by using her own personal experience as, for example, when it concerned the topic of the humanity of Christ.

“perhaps there is not the kind of faith that seeks intellectual comprehension (*fides quaerens intellectum*), typical of other Doctors, but a faith that seeks to obey grace in the gift of being aware of freedom, that abandons itself totally to God, with a vibrant response that comprehends the mystery of divine love in daily life”.²⁴ Before the theology of these privileged witnesses of the supernatural is conceptualised and communicated by word and in writing, it is a lived theology that describes above all the divine action that is taking place within them.

The extraordinary originality of their work depends precisely on the fact that they are transmitting their experience, and that they keep their distance from concepts that are abstract and distant from life. Each of them has a unique and unmistakable message, her own personal story. Their doctrine, although it stems from the Tradition of the Church, inspired by Sacred Scripture and the magisterium, and their language, although it is determined by the historical and cultural circumstances of their times, carries the unmistakable imprint of their lives and mission.

Truth is undoubtedly the substance of the *Dialogue*, as in all of Catherine’s doctrine, and this is primarily because the mystical nuptials “in faith” she experienced brought about a mysterious transformation in Catherine’s soul. After her profound and total dedication to the eternal Truth, revealed Truth is no longer something external to her. It has become intimately hers: her Spouse, her very life.²⁵

Something similar occurred in the life of Teresa of Avila. The revelation of the love of Christ through the statue of the *Ecce Homo*²⁶

²⁴ J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, “Santa Teresa di Gesù Bambino ‘Dottore della Chiesa’”, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Cf. CTDCS, Postulatory Letters, Mother Luigia Tincani. Superior General of the Union of Saint Catherine of Siena. *Missionarie della Scuola*, 30 April 1968, 498.

²⁶ It was a representation of Christ most grievously wounded; and so devotional, that the very sight of it, when I saw it, moved me—so well did it show forth that which He suffered for us” (*Life* 9:1 in: *The Life of Saint Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel*, trans. David Lewis, New York 1904, 75).

affected her deeply. The path of prayer as friendship in and with Jesus that leads to the centre of the soul inhabited by God, is simply her personal experience given in a doctrinal synthesis, “an existential or phenomenological truth, that is, not simple intellectual truth but rather excellence, the fullness of a truth that fills one’s being”.²⁷

The same thing occurs with Thérèse of Lisieux. Her writings tell about her extraordinary path that led through expectations, desires and sufferings, but she was urged on especially by a tenacious and persevering courage that longed to reach merciful Love. She experienced this Love in every stage of her life and wanted to share it with everyone around her.²⁸

In synthesis, nobody – as we have observed – has ever spoken better than Catherine about the Most Holy Trinity and the greatness of God, nobody has ever defended the humanity of Christ better than Teresa of Jesus,²⁹ and nobody has ever witnessed to the mercy of the Father better than Thérèse of Lisieux, and that is because their teaching reflects the intimate experience of their relationship with God.

Moreover, their particular experience is of such depth that it has universal validity. By means of their active personalities and their action in history, the mysterious relationship between God and humankind emerges and is revealed. We see how the divine Spirit can shape souls, and when accepted by the human self, it transforms, unifies and integrates the complexity of the feminine soul and the human soul as such.

²⁷ J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, “Spiritualità teresiana, esperienza e dottrina”, in: *Introduzione alla lettura di Santa Teresa di Gesù. Ambiente storico e letteratura teresiana*, ed. A. BARRIENTOS, Roma 2004, 124.

²⁸ Cf. *Introduction aux lettres*, in: SAINTE THÉRÈSE DE L’ENFANT-JÉSUS ET DE LA SAINTE-FACE, *Oeuvres complètes*, Editions du Cerf-Desclée de Brouwer, 1997, 296. Moreover, Thérèse revealed the strength of her personality in her determination to answer her vocation when she disobeyed the vicar general, Mgr. Révérony, and presented her request to Leo XIII to obtain the grace of entering the Carmelite convent before she was of age.

²⁹ Cf. “Dalla commemorazione del cardinale Gabriele Garrone”, 29 October 1970, in: *Ave Maria*, 51.

From their writings, even though they do not seem to be treatises in systematic theology, there is a new awareness of the great mystery of God and human beings that illumines the great truths of faith from within and shines its light on future history.

2.3. *A relational theology*

The existential theology of these mystical Doctors always arises from dialogue with concrete people, human or divine. Therefore, their contribution is never purely theoretical, nor systematic, but it demonstrates that God works in souls with supreme freedom that cannot be described with human categories.³⁰

Their writings are intertwined with prayer, and their thought, often in the form of letters, reveals the depths of their spirit, the reality and history of their times, and their experience and doctrine.³¹ Even their longer works, those that are autobiographical or doctrinal, bear this dialogic quality. Teresa of Avila mostly wrote in obedience to her confes-

³⁰ Cf. CTDTA, *Litterae Postulatoriae*, H. CARRIER, Pontifical Gregorian University, 18 December 1967, 39. For his part, Royo Marín said about Catherine: “It is very difficult, not to say impossible, to mark out a schema that could contain with simplicity the fundamental points that stand out in this book [The Dialogue]” (*Tre donne sante*, op. cit., 144).

³¹ “Almost half of the material written by Saint Teresa that has reached us is in her letters, a collection of letters preserved in every detail [...]. They are marvellous examples of this genre of writing [...], any edition of the Saint’s works that voluntarily omits her letters disqualifies itself” (L. RODRIGUEZ MARTINEZ – T. EGIDO, “Epistolario”, in: *Introduzione alla lettura*, 527). With regard to the letters of Saint Catherine, we must remember that “the author did not know how to write (a truly unusual case), therefore ‘original’ letters of hers in the widest sense of the word did not even exist, in the sense that they were not ‘autographed’, although they might be ‘authentic’”. Moreover, letters handed down suffer omissions: excluded are the passing on of the personal and confidential imprint, and that of a purely informative character, in order to emphasise the ascetic, religious and devotional character of the letters, “the value of being ‘spiritual documents’ to the detriment of being a ‘human document’ in the widest sense of the term, which for us is equally deserving of consideration, but was not so for contemporaries of the saint” (cf. CTDCS, E. DUPRÉ THESEIDER, *Epistolario di santa Caterina da Siena*, 39-43).

sors and described and recounted her personal journey to help those following a similar process, in particular her Carmelite daughters.³² Precisely because she was writing for others, Teresa maintained a colloquial tone.

Catherine also wrote on the basis of human or divine relations. It was said about her that: “when reading some of her letters we can imagine them spoken, maybe as she was walking, or contemplating the sky, perhaps on her knees, but always in dialogue, as if the person being addressed was right in front of her. We can never imagine her sitting like a teacher or an office manager”.³³ Not only the *Letters*, but also Catherine’s most extensive work, the *Dialogue*, arose – as the title itself indicates – from her intimate dialogue with God. It is therefore a theology that developed in an environment of a network of human and divine relationships. It is a “relational” theology that expresses the complex and transforming relationship between God and his creatures. We can say the same about Thérèse of Lisieux. Her *Letters* reveal the dynamic energy of her soul that continuously sought absolute Love. They form a real complement to her autobiographical manuscripts which were also addressed to specific people, her sisters Pauline and Marie, and Mother Marie de Gonzague. They are interwoven with comments, sharing of memories, and prayers to God, which Thérèse herself called “digressions”. We cannot forget that, in addition to their *Letters*, these saints left us *Prayers* addressed to Our Lady, to the Trinity and to Jesus. Moreover, the two Teresas, by means of their poetry and/or “pious recreations”, expressed their feelings and thoughts to God and

³² The *Life* was written in obedience to her spiritual directors and to the voice of God; *Foundations* on the request of her confessor at the time, Fr. Ripalda. However, Teresa, a woman and nun of her times, claimed that it was in obedience to her confessors in order to justify the works destined to transmit her experience and to serve her Carmelite daughters: *Way of perfection, Meditations on the Canticle, Interior Castle*.

³³ J. SALVADOR Y CONDE, *Epistolario de Santa Catalina de Siena. Espíritu y doctrina*, Biblioteca Dominicana, Salamanca 1982, 224.

their sisters in religion, and at the same time the desire to entertain and make people happy.

2.4. *A theology to transform lives*

As the theology of Catherine, Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux arose from their lived experience, and the contents are drawn from all that they encountered and underwent, and as it is addressed to specific people that were with them in daily life, their writings have the principle aim of involving the reader in their life experiences. It is a pedagogical kind of writing, precisely because it is not limited to mere exposition, but it also asks for sharing of their experience, involvement in the “way of prayer”, in the “little way”, in “knowing God”, in oneself and from oneself in God. The three saints are Doctors in that they are teachers and mothers. They teach and communicate why their teaching should be interiorised, assimilated, translated not only in thoughts, but in an existential change, in a new way of seeing, of appreciating reality, and of acting.

Teresa of Avila does not communicate her sublime message on prayer only as doctrine, but as fervent encouragement to practise prayer with desire, in the conviction that it is of great benefit to the soul to spend time “conversing in secret with Him who, we know, loves us”.³⁴ Catherine too – as Paul VI observed – certainly received the charisms of science and wisdom to an extraordinary degree, but above all she had the charism of persuasion. Her *Letters* are sparks of mysterious fire, set alight by the Spirit, who wants to communicate and light up the hearts of those whom the mystical saint urgently calls to imitation of Christ. What can we say of Thérèse of Lisieux? What fervour animated her young heart! In the great page on the primacy of love in the life of the

³⁴ *Life*, 8: 7, in: *The Life of Saint Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel*, op. cit., 72.

Church, she says: “In spite of my littleness, I would like to enlighten souls as did the Prophets and the Doctors. I have the vocation of the Apostle”.³⁵

We can see that this is a theology directed towards life in order to transform it, purify it, make it divine with the light and fire of the Spirit. That is why their words reveal an intense desire to renew customs, to reform religious life, to purify holy Church and particularly its ministers. In this way, not only do they present a teaching, but they lead their disciples to the divine light of grace. They become spiritual mothers, teachers and educators, and they fulfil what John Paul II emphasised in *Mulieris Dignitatem*: “The ‘woman’, as mother and first teacher of the human being (education being the spiritual dimension of parenthood), has a specific precedence over the man”.³⁶

2.5. An ecclesial theology, an expression of love for Jesus

As a corollary of what we have said so far, we should observe that their doctrine expresses a strong yet painful belonging to the Church. They are daughters and disciples, but also mothers, because they are spouses of Jesus, the Head of the Mystical Body. From their intimate union with God is born their lively participation in the destiny of the Church and their boundless desire to serve it and its children, for whom Jesus spilled his blood, was scourged and crucified, forgotten and abandoned. The divisions, sins and sufferings that wound the

³⁵ *Story of a Soul: the Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, Washington 1996, 192.

³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 19. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), no. 51, John Paul II said that women are entrusted with the moral dimension of culture: “In particular, two great tasks entrusted to women merit the attention of everyone. First of all, the task of bringing full dignity to the conjugal life and to motherhood. [...] Secondly, women have the task of assuring the moral dimension of culture, the dimension, namely of a culture worthy of the person, of an individual yet social life”.

Church are wrenching at Jesus himself, as “the Church is none other than the same Christ”.³⁷ Each in her own way was attracted by a mysterious force that united her to the divine Spouse, immersing her in the breadth and depth of ecclesial life.

Did Thérèse of Lisieux not write that it was the discovery she made during her visit to Rome of the fragility and imperfection of the priests that made her understand her vocation to the Carmelites?³⁸ The pages about her discovery of the vocation to Love in the Church are among the most profound and intense of all her writings: “I understood that since the Church is a body composed of different members, the noblest and most important of all the organs would not be wanting. I knew that the Church has a heart, that this heart burns with love. [...] Then, beside myself with joy, I cried out: ‘O Jesus, my Love, at last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love!’”.³⁹

Teresa of Avila also felt responsible for the destiny of her times. The concerns in those days included the American Indians, the Moors, the Lutherans, and the Church that was badly in need of reform. In view of so many problems, the saint felt great sorrow. She had a sharp perception of the division of Christians and an intense desire to serve the Church.⁴⁰ In the Foundations, Teresa says: “I waited on the Lord

³⁷ Letter 171, in: S. NOFFKE, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena* Volume II, Tempe USA 2001, 25.

³⁸ Thérèse wrote: “Having never lived close to them [priests], I was not able to understand the principal aim of the Reform of Carmel. To pray for sinners attracted me, but to pray for the souls of priests whom I believed to be as pure as crystal seemed puzzling to me! She added: “How beautiful is the vocation, O Mother, which has as its aim the preservation of the salt destined for souls!” (*Story of a Soul*, op. cit., 122).

³⁹ *Story of a Soul*, op. cit., 112. On the occasion of the proclamation of Saint Thérèse as Doctor, it was said that “Thérèse received particular light on the reality of Christ’s Mystical Body, on the variety of its charisms, gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the eminent power of love, which in a way is the very heart of the Church, where she found her vocation as a contemplative and missionary” (JOHN PAUL II, *Divini Amoris Scientia*, no. 8).

⁴⁰ Cf. J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, “Spiritualità teresiana”, in: *Introduzione alla lettura*, op. cit., 214.

always with my poor prayers, and got my sisters to do the same, and to have zeal for the good of souls, and for the increase of the Church”.⁴¹ Her reform, the numerous foundations she established, were guided by her ardent longing to make up for the evils done to Jesus by so many enemies. She found in a life of prayer, in a small number of contemplative souls, the inner strength to sustain the Church during the difficult times of the Lutheran schism.⁴²

Catherine of Siena’s mission was also directed towards bringing about reform in holy Church. She relentlessly exhorted and reproached popes, cardinals, bishops and priests, religious and lay people, always with humility and respect.⁴³ Catherine witnessed the Church being torn apart, and she worked tirelessly to bring peace. She placed at the centre of her teachings the power of the Blood of Christ and the mission of the

⁴¹ *Foundations*, I, 5 in: *The Book of the Foundations of S. Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel*, trans. David Lewis, New York 1913, 9.

⁴² In the first chapter of *Way of Perfection*, Teresa related: “At about this time there came to my notice the harm and havoc that were being wrought in France by these Lutherans and the way in which their unhappy sect was increasing. This troubled me very much, and, as though I could do anything, or be of any help in the matter, I wept before the Lord and entreated Him to remedy this great evil”. She went on: “And, seeing that I was a woman, and a sinner, and incapable of doing all I should like in the Lord’s service, and as my whole yearning was, and still is, that, as He has so many enemies and so few friends, these last should be trusty ones, I determined to do the little that was in me—namely, to follow the evangelical counsels as perfectly as I could, and to see that these few nuns who are here should do the same [...] and all of us, by busying ourselves in prayer for those who are defenders of the Church, and for the preachers and learned men who defend her, should do everything we could to aid this Lord of mine Who is so much oppressed by those to whom He has shown so much good that it seems as though these traitors would send Him to the Cross again and that He would have nowhere to lay His head” (*The Way of Perfection*, trans. E. Allison Peers, London 1991, 6).

⁴³ The elegant Letter 16 is often quoted. In it, Saint Catherine exhorts a high prelate: “Oimé! No more silence! Shout out with a hundred thousand tongues! I am seeing the world going to ruin because people are not speaking out! I am seeing Christ’s bride made pallid, her color drained, because her blood is being sucked from behind her back. I mean that by their pride they are stealing Christ’s blood” in: S. NOFFKE, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena* Volume II, op. cit., 117.

Church. She was convinced that reform in customs – particularly of the sacred ministers – would have to pass through humble and incessant prayer, and the sweat and tears of the servants of God, and she did not hold back in anything in order to achieve her aim. At the end of her short life, Catherine implored: “O Eternal God, receive the sacrifice of my life in this mystical body of Holy Church! I have naught to give save what Thou hast given to me. Take then my heart, and may Thy Bride lean her face upon it!”⁴⁴

2.6. *A wide-ranging theology*

The granting of the title Doctor of the Church not only implies recognition of “eminent” doctrine, but also its diffusion and influence. The data that emerged from the *Positiones* are significant and, in a certain sense, amazing. Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Thérèse of the Child Jesus have had very wide influence, and their works are read far more than so many other Doctors of the Church,⁴⁵ and by a very different public of men and women, learned and less educated, in far away places and cultures. What is the human basis for such wide dissemination? I would emphasise two aspects: the language and the essential content of their writings.

2.6.a. *Simple concrete language*

In the postulatory letters, Cardinal Florit and the bishops and abbots of Tuscany wrote: “Anyone who is at all familiar with theology

⁴⁴ Letter 371, in: *Saint Catherine of Siena as Seen in Her Letters*, trans. Vida Dutton Scudder, London 1905.

⁴⁵ Bishop Jean E.L. Rupp of Monaco said about the doctrine of Catherine and Teresa of Avila: “To begin with a subject *a fortiori*, I would say that the works of these saints have had a stronger influence in doctrine, being more profound, long lasting and universal than many authors who had already been declared Doctors of the Church, like Peter Chrysologus or Peter Damian, for example, to say nothing of Anthony of Padua whose works are rarely read...” (CTDCS, *Lettere postulatorie*, 479).

finds it difficult to express Christian truth and, in view of our distracted human psychology, to put into effect the apostolic voice of that teaching. However, Saint Catherine, by maintaining the exactness of scientific language, stirs our hearts with the fire of love and wisdom [...]. We could say that the joining of theological content with Tuscan language is sealed and engraved in the *Letters* of the Saint in a miraculous way”.⁴⁶

Catherine touches our hearts with the strength of her burning words. As we said, she was the only great Italian woman writer before 1800.⁴⁷ Thérèse of Lisieux touches us with the spontaneous freshness of her youthful style. She transmits her experience with feminine language that is concrete, direct, and familiar,⁴⁸ so that her doctrine does not seem to be reserved for the wise and learned, but is comprehensible even to the “smallest”.⁴⁹

Teresa of Avila also had the gift of words. Her books contain some of the best pages of Christian literature and are among the most remarkable works in the Spanish language.⁵⁰ “They have the style of the Gospel and the letters of Paul, and they are confessions like Augustine’s book and have spiritual commentaries on Scripture as in Origen [...]. Her writings on prayer could form part of those spiritual anthologies that, like the *Philocalia*, have gathered the best of the doctrine of East-

⁴⁶ CTDCS, *Lettere postulatorie*: Letter from Cardinal Ermenegildo Florit, Archbishop of Florence. Most Rev. Mario I. Castellano, O.P., Bishop of Siena. The archbishops, bishops and abbots of the region of Tuscany, 12 September 1968 – Florence, 473.

⁴⁷ “There is only one great woman writer in Italy: Saint Catherine of Siena” (J. DE BLASI, *Le scrittrici italiane dalle origini al 1800*, Firenze 1930, 32. Cit. in: CTDCS, A. HUERGA, *Santa Catalina en la espiritualidad hispana*, 362, note 146). G. Papini was also amazed and in awe at the language as it delighted his poetic sensibility.

⁴⁸ Cf. CTDETH, Chap. 12: *Actualité de la Doctrine de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux pour l’Eglise et le monde d’aujourd’hui*, 558.

⁴⁹ CTDETH, Chap. 2: *Histoire du doctorat de Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux* – Lettre du Card. Roger Etchegaray – Président de la Conférence Episcopale Française, 51.

⁵⁰ Cf. CTDTA, *Litterae postulatoriae*, Letter by Card. Giuseppe Siri, Bishop of Genoa, 13.

ern writers on prayer”.⁵¹ Her style, like that of Catherine and Thérèse of Lisieux, is simple. It has a special realism that can express with a sense of humour the vicissitudes of daily life and translate into human words the most mystical encounters with God, her ineffable experiences. Teresa, being a woman, founder and mother, was aware of the need to express herself in a language that was comprehensible and accessible to her nuns. Moreover, as she herself recognised, she “was no poet”, and she used to improvise “certain stanzas, full of feeling”.⁵²

The three mystical Doctors transmit their powerful thought in a concrete way. Catherine puts forward strong images with perfect mastery, and she carves impressive metaphors in a brilliant way, like that of perfume and the taste of the Blood of the Lord in order to express her inner life inebriated in the presence of the crucified Christ.⁵³ Teresa of Jesus used allegories: the orchard, interior castle, the silkworm, all pointing to spiritual reality that is difficult to translate into concepts, but that the concreteness of images makes accessible and comprehensible.⁵⁴ Thérèse of the Child Jesus also expresses herself with incarnate

⁵¹ J. CASTELLANO CERVERA, “Spiritualità Teresiana”, in: *Introduzione alla lettura*, op. cit., 145.

⁵² *Life* 16, 6, in: *The Life of Saint Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel*, op. cit. 111.

⁵³ “The cross and the blood of Christ. This blood! Catherine is as if inebriated with it. She sings it and she shouts it. The images are multiplied in a marvellous and dazzling disorder, re-translating for us the cold propositions of our books: this torrential ‘river’ that transports sins and sinners away; this ‘bridge’ thrown up that is none other than the Cross; that they climb up the ‘steps’ one by one towards the open side of Christ and finish at his mouth; these ‘winds’ that come from the four corners of the horizon to strike the human soul... We cannot resist being transported by this lyricism, but we marvel to see, point by point, that the rigour of doctrine is never sacrificed to the heat of sentiment. [...] Catherine did not create these images, but infused her life in them [...] What could those images have been before Catherine’s genius took them over?” (“Dalla commemorazione del cardinale Gabriele Garrone”, 29 October 1970, in: *Ave Maria*, 52).

⁵⁴ Her sensitivity had recourse to images that helped to find God, using them as an educator to help capture the realities it evoked” (CTDTA, *Lettere postulatorie*, H. CARRIER, 40).

language. Even though she was not a great writer, in the common understanding of the term, Thérèse had a sense of expression⁵⁵ and her style often rises above the limits of the culture of her time and her young age, illuminated by the beauty of her contemplative gaze and her ardent heart. Her intense love of nature helped her to recognise very early on the divine presence in the sky, sea, mountains, animals, flowers, water, fire... All of these symbols of nature are to be found in her writings. We also find the “elevator” which is the arm of God that lifts her to the summit of sanctity, the “ball” that the child Jesus plays with, the “needles” of daily irritations, her “little boat” which is her soul... Although Thérèse declared, “I am not aiming at a literary masterpiece”,⁵⁶ her writings are charming.

The simple concrete language of these mystics transforms their doctrine into contemplation, narration, supplication, poetry and drama, and enriches it with spontaneity and beauty. It is doctrine overflowing with truth, love and life. This is what is so fascinating about these great saints.

2.6.b. An essential theology lived in daily life

On the occasion of the conferral of the title of Doctor on Thérèse of Lisieux, it was observed that the extent of her work is very limited. However, neither Teresa of Avila nor Catherine of Siena wrote very much either. As regards Teresa of Avila, it was said that her “production is relatively modest with respect to her indescribable interior experience: one and a half thousand pages make up her works and as many again in the letters that have reached us”.⁵⁷ Catherine’s work is perhaps

⁵⁵ Cf. CTDETH, Chap. 4: *La personnalité de S. Thérèse de Lisieux*, 90.

⁵⁶ *Story of a Soul*, op. cit., 93.

⁵⁷ L. BORRIELLO, General introduction to: TERESA D’AVILA, *Opere complete*, Milano 1998, 30.

even shorter. In addition to the *Dialogue*, her production comprises the three hundred and eighty one *Letters* published so far, and her *Prayers*. Nonetheless, the doctrine is rich and essential. In fact, perhaps we could say that it is precisely the relative brevity that gives the writings of the three saints a special incisiveness and force. Each one knows how to sketch almost with one stroke the teaching that she wishes to convey.

This ability to look at the essential is characteristic of Catherine's personality, her style and her writings.⁵⁸ Iginò Giordani declared that "Catherine restores the essence of religion in an era of theological disputes [...], and she rekindled the Christian revolution with the only fuel that is in her: love".⁵⁹ The truth of love that comes from knowledge of God in us and of us in God according to the well-known formula attributed to eternal Truth: "I am who am, and you are who are not",⁶⁰ is the pivot of Catherine's theology. Catherine's "policy" follows her spiritual magisterium, and that is to live her control over her passions profoundly so that by controlling herself, her control over others would be done in charity and justice.⁶¹ This sublime and practical theology requires us to be continuously involved in human questions, even the most humble, and to light up temporal reality with faith by reestablishing human relations according to truth and love in order to lead humanity, family and society to a life of grace.

⁵⁸ Cf. G. CAVALLINI, "Una popolana fra i Dottori", in: *Gazzetta di Mantova*, 30 aprile 1968, 3.

⁵⁹ CTDCS, *Lettere postulatorie*, Letter by prof. Iginò Giordani, Rector of the *Mystici Corporis* International Cultural Institute, 511.

⁶⁰ Raymond of Capua recounts how Catherine often told her confessors about "what took place when Our Lord Jesus Christ first began to appear to her. He appeared to her one day while she was at prayer, and said: 'Do you know, daughter, who you are and who I am? If you know these two things you have beatitude in your grasp. You are she who is not, and I am He who is'" (RAYMOND OF CAPUA, *Life of Catherine of Siena*, Dublin 1980, no. 92, 85).

⁶¹ M.L. MATTEI, O.P., "Pensiero politico di Caterina: un'eredità per oggi", in: *Ave Maria*, 114.

Teresa of Avila also drew up an essential theology, and its cornerstone is the path of prayer. At first she seems to be a mystic who is rich in absolutely extraordinary gifts: visions and divine conversations, ecstasies, and even the gift of prophecy. She is a woman who had the exceptional experience of the transverberation and reached the summit of spiritual marriage. In all of this Teresa is beyond reach for us. At the same time, though, she shows herself to be a very human person and her doctrine is accessible to all who wish to progress in Christian prayer.⁶² In fact, she opened up for many souls who thirsted for God a way that seemed to be reserved to very few of the “initiated”. She explained, with her experienced and inspired teaching, a dimension that was not without darkness and uncertainty, that the true love of God, infused charity, that which God works in souls sometimes with ordinary means, the less ostentatious it is, the more perfect is God’s work in souls.⁶³ Teresa not only led and leads many souls, including simple people, to the threshold of contemplation,⁶⁴ but she is an expert in listening and following in the most diverse conditions of life.⁶⁵ Hers is the message of a woman who follows the path of contemplation while being immersed in a very active life. This does not only mean the way of prayer, but the fundamental value of that love for God and for souls that lights up and communicates through her writings: “And, believe me, it is not length of time that enables a soul to make progress in

⁶² The saint of Avila has been recognised by scholars of spirituality as the “Mystical Doctor”, because she illustrated and facilitated the study and practice of mystical theology, and she made it attractive by describing the progressive steps and by showing their fascination and usefulness (cf. J. ARINTERO, *La verdadera mística tradicional*, Salamanca 1928, c.6, p.172, in: CTDTA, *De Conventientia Declarandi Sanctam Teresam a Iesu Virginem, Eccl. Doctorem*, 54, nota 25).

⁶³ Cf. CTDTA, *Litterae postulatoriae*, Letter by Most Rev. Giuseppe d’Avack, Rome, 1 October 1968, 13.

⁶⁴ Cf. CTDTA, *Litterae postulatoriae*, Letter by Card. Giuseppe Siri, Bishop of Genoa, s.d., 8.

⁶⁵ Cf. CTDTA, *Litterae postulatoriae*, Letter by Claudio Catena, General Procurator of the Carmelites, 15 December 1967, 33.

prayer; if it is given up to active work also that is a great help whereby the soul in a very short time may attain to a better preparation for the enkindling of its love than it could attain to by many hours spent in meditation.⁶⁶ Having reached the seventh mansion, Teresa teaches us that Martha and Mary come together in their common love for Christ.⁶⁷

The high mysticism of Teresa of Avila and Catherine and the influence they exercised in the Church did not contradict the simplicity and accessibility of their teaching, for it reached the common folk and the learned, men and women, young and adult. Thérèse of the Child Jesus had these traits of simplicity, familiarity and essentiality to a degree that was emblematic. Thérèse is the saint of the essential and everyday *par excellence* who can reach out to the great and the small. It is quite moving to consider how this young Carmelite, almost unknown in her times, was not only a guide for her family, her novices and her sisters in religion, but she also became a source of inspiration for the magisterium of Pius X and John Paul II, for the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, for so many synods of bishops, even for the Catechism of the Church,⁶⁸ and that she continues to influence religious institutes, movements, men and women in all conditions of life, culture, state, class, continent, religion and even those who adhere to no religion.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Foundations*, 5,17, in: *The Book of the Foundations of S. Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel*, op. cit., 48. In addition to the great writings like the *Life*, *Way of Perfection*, *Interior Castle*, Teresa testifies to her participation in the religious and earthly happenings of her times in *Foundations* and in the *Letters* (cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Multiformis Sapientia Dei*. Saint Teresa of Jesus, Virgin of Avila, Doctor of the Church, 27 September 1970).

⁶⁷ “Believe me, both Martha and Mary must entertain our Lord and keep Him as their Guest, nor must they be so inhospitable as to offer Him no food. How can Mary do this while she sits at His feet, if her sister does not help her”. She adds: “His food is that in every possible way we should draw souls to Him so that they may be saved and may praise Him for ever” (*Interior Castle*, VII, 4: 17,18, in: *The Interior Castle or the Mansions*, trans. The Benedictines of Stanbrook, London 1921, 149).

⁶⁸ Cf. CTDETH, Chap. 11: *Rayonnement et influence de S. Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus*.

⁶⁹ Among those who captured the singular value of Thérèse's doctrine, we can mention Servant of God Luis M. Etchevery Boneo, founder of the “Servidoras”, who said:

What is the secret of her doctrine? Everyone recognises the work of the Holy Spirit in her and in her writings that led her to remind us of the enduring newness of the Gospel with simplicity and freshness.⁷⁰ Thérèse is contemporary and modern because her “little way” has rediscovered the essence of Christianity, which is to be like children in the arms of the Father.⁷¹ Her trust and unconditional abandonment to God, her offering to the all-merciful Love, lived day by day – first in the welcoming environment of Alençon and Les Buissonnets, then in the austere and demanding setting of the Carmelite convent in Lisieux,⁷² in times of health and illness, of shining faith and of the dark night endured towards the end of her life – make Thérèse’s message so radical and vibrant. What she said about herself on her deathbed: “*Je suis un bébé qui est un vieillard*”,⁷³ also goes for her doctrine. We have to know how to decipher Thérèse’s theology-witness in order to realise the

“ This spirituality that was born behind the grilles of the Carmelite convent, is, among the schools of spirituality of the Church, precisely and undoubtedly destined to become the most important doctrine for men and women who are not called by God to speak only to Him, but who live in the world and speak to other people ” (*Espiritualidad de Santa Teresa del Niño Jesús*, Ciclo de cuatro conferencias en el Carmelo de Lisieux, Buenos Aires. First conference, in: *Lo eterno y lo temporal*, Buenos Aires 1959. Pro-manuscripto).

⁷⁰ “ Thérèse is a teacher of the spiritual life with a doctrine both spiritual and profound, which she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the divine Teacher ” (JOHN PAUL II, *Divini Amoris Scientia*, no. 3).

⁷¹ Thérèse tells of how she was assigned the difficult task of guiding the novices, and she realised that this was beyond her strength. “ Throwing myself without delay into Our Lord’s Arms, I imitated those tiny children, who, when they are frightened, hide their faces on their father’s shoulder, and I said: ‘ Dear Lord, Thou seest that I am too small to feed these little ones, but if through me Thou wilt give to each what is suitable, then fill my hands, and without leaving the shelter of Thine Arms, or even turning away, I will distribute Thy treasures to the souls who come to me asking for food ’ ” (*Story of a Soul*, op. cit., 97). This passage sums up the attitude she maintained throughout her life.

⁷² The Carmelite convent in Lisieux was small and poor. The average age of those in the community was 47: “ A poor community, spiritually influenced by the severity of the times that were characterised by a fear of an avenging God that had been instilled into them by the Jansenists ” (CTDETII, Chap.12: *Actualité de la Doctrine*, 563).

⁷³ CTDETII, Chap. 4, *La personnalité de S. Thérèse de Lisieux*, 92.

extent of her wisdom and her strength of love, that which vanquishes death, and how much eternal light, that which does not lose any sense of time, are concealed in her narration of the daily events of her life. The young Thérèse, the “ virgin warrior ”, as she has been described,⁷⁴ suggests a childlike way which takes for granted the difficult struggle that is needed in order to accept theological hope, a struggle that consists in continually renewing trust in the fact that, even after so many obstacles, God always saves.

3. CONCLUSION

At the end of our journey, we can affirm that the three mystical Doctors and brides of Christ, bring together in a paradigmatic way the life, teaching and mission of the Church. They received their doctrine from the Heart of their Spouse, Jesus. They have treasured it, meditated on it and transmitted it like Mary – illustration of the Church – and not only do they become disciples, but also teachers who educate and mothers who give life in the fecundity of the Spirit. Their doctrine maintains a relationship that is constitutive, direct and touches life. It is born of life, and the contents are their experience of life, expressed with the language of life. Because of this close and immediate connection with life – and life is love, because the soul that does not love, Saint John of the Cross tells us, is dead – from their writings, from their doctrine, not only the light of revelation emanates, but also the force of conversion.

Teresa, Catherine and Thérèse of the Child Jesus teach us that the human being is not conceived alone, but always in concrete human relations and in the great family of the Church, the heart of which is love.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 91. Thérèse was very fond of Joan of Arc who was not canonised until 1920.

They tell us that it is worth living in complete forgetfulness of self and as a gift for others; that the real strength is that of prayer and love; that we can give generously, in over-abundance, not through obligation, but because the heart is overflowing. As Catherine of Siena wrote, “Forgive me for writing so much, but my hands and tongue run along with my heart”.⁷⁵

The theology that was lived by the three saints, the lovely images drawn from daily life, the essentialness of the doctrine permeated with love for their mystical Spouse and for their interlocutors, lead us to the radical simplicity of Jesus and his teaching.

They are Doctors in a feminine way, as only women mystics can be, humble and great. Like the Church, they live in the reflected light of the Sun that illumines and enchants. They show us, through their teaching, that although the men Doctors teach us love for the truth, the women Doctors, the great mystics, teach us the truth of love. They are two ways of doing theology that are not opposed to each other, but actually enrich each other.

⁷⁵ Letter 272, in: S. NOFFKE, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena* Volume II, op. cit., 506.

Faithful to the Truth even unto Martyrdom

JACK SCARISBRICK*

There have been three periods in England's Catholic history when women played an especially important part in the Church's life. The first was in the early Middle Ages, notably the 7th and 8th centuries, which produced a remarkable collection of formidable, holy women (many of royal descent) like Etheldreda, Ethelburga, Frideswide, Hilda, Osburga, Werburg who presided over often large and influential double monasteries and, especially in the case of Hilda, played a conspicuous part in ecclesiastical affairs of the day. The third was over a thousand years later – in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, when, in England as in so many other lands, thousands of devoted nuns undertook selfless and often largely unrecorded work in providing free elementary education for the poor, and running orphanages, homes for the disabled, hospices and hospitals.

Between these two heroic periods stands a third. It was different because lay women were its heroines. That is why it has especial relevance to discussion about the unique contribution of women – ordinary lay women – to the life of the Church. The story runs thus.

In 1559 England became officially a Protestant country. The Mass was abolished, Catholic bishops removed and replaced by Protestant ones and an essentially Calvinist religious settlement imposed on the country. The old religion was outlawed and thereafter subject to erratic, inefficient but often savage persecution – indeed, increasingly savage persecution. Catholic laypeople faced exclusion from public life and

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eventually crippling fines for non-attendance at Protestant services. It was soon a capital offence to harbour a priest or to be reconciled to the Church or to practice the Faith, let alone to be a priest.

English Catholicism would have died a slow, quiet death of spiritual malnutrition (which is what Queen Elizabeth in particular intended) but for the following: the survival of a large number of dispossessed priests who continued to serve an increasingly underground Church; the arrival from the 1570s onwards of a growing number of many zealous priests who had been ordained in English seminaries set up on the Continent – secular priests and then religious (notably Jesuits); the constancy of so many English laypeople, male and female - especially the latter.

Again and again we encounter this fact: the English lay Catholic community during what English Catholics know as Penal times everywhere boasted more women than men. I make no attempt here to explain this fact. I merely report it. Let me give some quick evidence for it. In 1606 there was a sudden anti-Catholic purge which resulted in some 820 Catholics being newly indicted, that is, brought before the chief court of the land and charged. Of these 820 new offenders, 532 (65 per cent) were women: 284 wives, 37 widows and 211 spinsters. In the county in which I live (Warwickshire – then a notoriously ‘papistical’ part of the land) there were 235 new victims, 172 of them (nearly 70 per cent) women. In Yorkshire, the proportion was even higher: 83 out of 109 (i.e. nearly 80 per cent).¹

It is important to understand what all this meant in human terms. All those women faced heavy fines and even prison for their recusancy, that is, their refusal to attend Protestant church services (from the Latin *recusare* – to refuse). Many of those listed were probably servants in

¹ PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE (London), *State Papers of James I*, vol 16, fo 214. Other women who expressed similar views included three wives of tailors, two drapers’ wives and a locksmith’s.

those Catholic country houses which played so important a part in sustaining the underground Church. They would have been hand-picked by their mistresses precisely because they would not inform the authorities of the comings and goings to the house of missionary priests, the secret Masses, baptisms and marriages, and so on. But *married* recusant women were in a very daunting situation. If their husbands were still loyal Catholics, their joint recusancy could put everything at risk. If the husbands were Protestants or conforming (as many no doubt were) by not conforming themselves the wives were not only defying their spouses (and this in a society, as we are often told, which was strongly patriarchal) but could ruin them. A Catholic wife could cost a man his job (or public office) and *he* was liable for the fines for her non-attendance at the parish church. He could be forced to enter into bonds for her good behaviour and even face prison if she defaulted. In short, to be a recusant woman, especially a recusant wife of a non-Catholic could require enormous courage.

It could eventually cost lives. Of the 190-odd English Catholics who suffered martyrdom during the fiercest persecution under Elizabeth I, there are three famous women. Their stories vividly illustrate some of the ways in which the old Faith was sustained by female effort.

Margaret Clitherow, wife of a butcher in York, had herself been reconciled to the Church at the age of 18 and was married to a loving, tolerant non-Catholic. Her home became a radiant centre of Catholic activism: seminary priests and Jesuits secretly sheltered there, her children given a wonderful Catholic formation (two of the boys were later ordained). Eventually betrayed, she refused to plead to the charge of harbouring priests for fear of incriminating others and suffered the horrendous punishment for that refusal – being crushed to death by heavy stones laid on her prostrate body.

Then there was St Margaret Ward, a zealous unmarried woman who succoured Catholics in London prisons and helped a priest to escape by boat from one of them. Alas, she was identified by the gaoler,

then brutally flogged in an attempt to get her to betray fellow-Catholics and eventually, in August 1588, hanged for high treason at Tyburn (at Marble Arch, London).

In February 1601 St Anne Line, a widow, suffered the same fate at the same place. For years she had kept house for Jesuit priests working in London or coming there for retreats, using her skill with the needle to produce vestments in her spare time, sheltering young women on their way to convents in Flanders, instructing children in the Faith in a neighbouring house. Her faith had cost her her inheritance when her husband died and she suffered poor health. Eventually she was betrayed by a Judas in the Government's pay, arrested and condemned to death. She was so ill that she had to be taken to the scaffold in a chair.

These three, Margaret Clitherow, Margaret Ward and Anne Line are now canonised saints. There were almost two more.

Mrs Jane Wiseman of Essex was one of a distinguished collection of laywomen who had been sheltering or giving aid to the missionary priests, secular and Jesuit, when she was eventually arrested even as a secret Mass was being prepared for her wholly Catholic household. Because she refused to plead, she was condemned to the same death as that which Margaret Clitherow suffered. Somehow Queen Elizabeth was persuaded to halt the execution and her successor, James I, anxious to win Catholic support, released her from her long imprisonment. Thus she was spared martyrdom. Later one Margaret Gage and her husband spent two years in prison for harbouring the superior of the Jesuit mission in England, Henry Garnet, and were on their way to execution when the death sentence was commuted to banishment.

Yes, it could be argued that these three (almost five) female martyrdoms out of a total of over 200 does little to support my case. But I am going to argue now (and this is perhaps the most important thing I have to say) that this is not fair.

In the first place, consider women like Lady Montague in Sussex

(south England) or Dorothy Lawson in the north, who more or less openly defied the law and provided havens for priests, old and new, distributed rosaries and Catholic prayer-books, catechised the young, and visited the sick.

Consider those brave women who presided over those major Catholic gentry homes from which seminary priests and Jesuits, disguised as schoolmasters or whatever, and protected by priest-holes and elaborate escape routes could minister to the surrounding areas. These women were often running not only complicated households but were largely responsible for ensuring that their resident or visiting priests could safely say Mass and administer the sacraments. They also catechised their children, ensured that staff – even tenants – were safe, and would have to face sheriffs and posses when they arrived to carry out a sudden search of their homes armed with sniffer-dogs and crowbars.

Then consider all the women who went to prison because they had refused to attend their non-Catholic churches and had incurred huge unpaid fines as a result. There were scores of them. I cannot say exactly how many. In 1583 someone complained that there was no room in prisons for thieves and the like because they were full of Papists (Catholics). Many of these prisoners, of course, would have been men. But there were certainly a lot of women. In 1573, for instance, thirty Catholic ladies (all of what we would today call upper-class) were arrested in York and imprisoned in one fell swoop.

Now, we must be careful. Most prisons then were privately owned and you paid for what you got. Some were almost incredibly lax. You came and went (and ate) as you could afford. Others were abominable, deadly cess-pits, where a notorious disease called gaol-fever (dysentery?) reigned. Scores of Catholic women went into such prisons, some in and out several times, because they had refused to conform. For some, such imprisonment was not very onerous. For others it was lethal. Between 1579 and 1594, for example, eleven Catholic laywomen died in one of York's prisons alone.

I cannot give you a national total. I can only make responsible guesses.

I estimate that scores of Catholic women (maybe as many as 200) were imprisoned for the Faith between 1559 and 1603 by a regime which, on the whole, was not bloodthirsty and did not want to make martyrs – not least because it knew that, in those famous words, “blood of martyrs is seed of the Church”.² Of them, perhaps a third or maybe a quarter died in prison or as an immediate result of imprisonment.

Is that a lot or a little? I do not know.

All I do know is that it would greatly increase the list of English Martyrs if these Catholic heroines could meet the stringent requirements of Rome’s Congregation for Saints. Unfortunately, so little is known about them that they will never qualify for beatification, let alone anything higher.

I end with two remarks.

First, when a hatmaker’s Catholic wife in prison in York was asked why she would not attend Protestant services she replied ‘because there is neither priest, altar or sacrifice there’.³ I cannot think of a more succinct and accurate statement. Any professional theologian would have been proud of it.

Finally, consider the achievement of one of the many Catholic families which owed so much to the women in charge of their households, namely, the Bedingfields, a Suffolk dynasty. Eleven daughters of Francis Bedingfield (he died in 1644) became nuns. By the time of the French Revolution 29 Bedingfield girls had done so – entering exiled English communities on the Continent – and many of their brothers had become priests. Such was the Catholic culture which a great recusant family could produce, thanks above all to the women who inspired it.

² TERTULLIAN, *Apologeticum*, 50.

³ Cited in Caraman (ed), *The Other Face. Catholic Life under Elizabeth I*, London, 1960, 57.

II.2. Contemporary issues and cultural trends

Introduction

OLIMPIA TARZIA*

I would like to begin this talk with words spoken by the Holy Father at the most recent ecclesial convention of the Church in Italy. He declared that we are going through “a new wave of enlightenment and secularism [...], by which only that which is based on experience and can be calculated is rationally valid, while on the level of praxis, individual freedom is held as a fundamental value to which all others must be subject. Therefore, God remains excluded from culture and from public life [...]. Closely related to this, a radical reduction of the human being has taken place. The human being is considered to be a simple product of nature and as such not really free, and therefore likely to be treated like any other animal. Thus, there has been a real overturning of the point of departure of this culture which started out by claiming the centrality of human beings and their freedom. Along the same lines, ethics is brought within the confines of relativism and utilitarianism with the exclusion of every moral principle that is valid and binding in itself. It is not difficult to see how this type of culture represents a radical and profound break not only with Christianity but more in general with the religious and moral traditions of humanity. [...] The Church remains, therefore, a ‘sign of contradiction’ [...]. But we do not lose heart because of this. On the contrary, we must always be ready to give a response (apo-logia) to whoever asks us the reason (logos) for our hope”.¹

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¹ BENEDICT XVI, To the participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention of the Church in Italy, 19 October 2006.

The Holy Father's words remind us that we are living in a predominantly secular culture which offends human dignity. This culture trivialises sexuality and uses its strategies and strongest attacks wherever human life is weakest, at its frontiers: at its dawn and sunset, prenatal life and terminal life. These attacks are launched at both life and the family. Never so much as in these past few years has the ethical question on the right to life and the defence and advancement of the family founded on marriage been at the centre of the cultural and political debate in many countries.

It is actually a debate only in appearances. Culturally speaking, an absolute and intolerant secularism dominates that does not allow contradictions and refuses to dialogue. It accuses Catholics of trying to impose their vision and morals on those who are not Catholic. They call on the "Secular State", but they forget that a secular State has its roots in human rights, and above all on the right to life. They forget that the recognition of the family as a natural society founded on marriage is not just an opinion of the Church. Not only does it belong to the natural moral law, but it is also an affirmation present in many constitutions. It is in article 29 of the Italian constitution.

OBSCURANTISM OR VANGUARD?

"Spain is therefore at the vanguard of Europe and the world", declared Maria Teresa Fernandez De Vega, spokesperson for the Zapatero government. She was speaking of the governmental law that allows homosexual couples to have full civil marriage contracts that would therefore allow them to adopt children. What struck me most about this declaration was not the merit of the question (although I shall have something to say about this later), but rather the concept of vanguard mentioned by Ms de Vega. When we speak of "vanguard", my mind goes to Samuel Beckett, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Andy Warhol, to

name just a few who have been really avant-garde in the field of art. This term has also shaped other sectors of the human conscience, like that of science. The first heart transplant by Professor Barnard was certainly at the vanguard, just to give an example. In whatever context we wish to place it, the term “vanguard” is always synonymous with development. We imagine a front line heading towards progress in culture and science. This is why I was frankly disturbed to hear the word “vanguard” in that declaration by Ms de Vega. The reason for my concern is: should these legislative measures really be considered to be at the vanguard of development for Western culture and society at the start of the third millennium? If we enumerate just some of the approved draft laws to which Ms de Vega was referring, we can see that a divorce can be obtained after only six months if only one of the couple requests it (after only two months if both partners agree), euthanasia is decriminalised, the practice of abortion in the early weeks is an optional and the State has no right to even request an explanation from the mother, marriage between homosexual people is juridically recognised and they are granted the possibility of adopting, and scientific research without limits is authorised on human embryos. Can all of this, I ask, authorise a woman, a government spokesperson, to say that her country is at the vanguard of Europe and the world? My answer is a clear and decisive “no”, and this is the starting point of my argument. It is the recognition and the right to declare that there exists a very different concept of civil progress from that maintained by Ms de Vega. In our times, this right is often denied when, for example, we speak of subjects like the defence of life and the family, denied by the prevailing secularism that I referred to earlier. It is often considered to be a Catholic “fixation”, and by kind concession, Catholics are given permission to believe, as long as it is done privately, inside the secret rooms of convents. I am convinced that the subject of science and technology in the new scenarios cannot be done correctly and meaningfully if the human person is not placed at the centre. The ethical and anthropological question of

the right to life should be approached with serenity and with determination and clarity. At times I have the impression that Catholics feel a kind of “cultural inferiority complex”. At times it seems that the ever-present accusations of being “obscurantist, mediaeval and taleban” that are hurled at us when we speak in defence of the right to life, have had an intimidating effect. To those who accuse us of being anti-democratic because we impose our moral code on a secular state, we should have the courage to respond that the right to life does not have and should not have either religious or political labels. The small child who has been conceived is not a “political fact” nor an “invention by the Church”. This is someone’s child! This is the smallest, most fragile and most defenceless child in the human community. With this premise, the “people of life”, as John Paul II called us in *Evangelium Vitae*, are called to give even stronger witness. How can we be resigned to fifty three million abortions in the world every year? Who, if not the people of life, can be the voice of those without a voice, the smallest among our brothers and sisters, who in the countries where it is allowed, can be vivisected, thrown into a sink if they are unfortunately “not perfect”, considered unworthy to live because their “quality of life” would be unacceptable? What role have women in all of this? I like to remember that great woman Mother Teresa of Calcutta. When she received the Nobel Peace Prize, in her speech to world leaders, she declared: “What is peace if we do not save each life? Abortion is the greatest threat to peace in the world”.

MORAL RELATIVISM

The dominant culture that I am referring to is upheld by a very widespread line of thought, that of moral relativism, of which Pope Benedict XVI has often spoken, both recently and before as Cardinal Ratzinger. This is not something theoretical that philosophers study. It

is dreadfully concrete and can be breathed in the air. It has invaded everything, even our circles, and that awful “I think” denies the existence of an objective good and evil and leaves everything to individual conscience, to “individual truth”. The theory on which moral relativism depends is the following: absolute good and evil do not exist; each person, according to their own conscience, decides and evaluates that which they think is good or evil. The consequence of this theory is that there are no moral norms that are valid for everyone. A further consequence to this is, (and this is the debate I referred to earlier), do Catholics want to defend life and the family? They do so, but they do not impose their moral code on those who are not Catholic! How many times when the Pope or the Magisterium (or any of us) has spoken out in defence of life and the family founded on marriage, there has been a chorus of accusations in reply: “Why should Catholics and the Church interfere in a secular state?”. They speak of the secular nature of the State, but to those who say this we should respond clearly that a secular State is based on the democratic principles that are the origin of human rights. What is the first of the human rights? It is precisely the right to life, because if I am not alive I cannot exercise any other right. Therefore, a lay State should defend the right to life! It is its duty. Then I, as a Catholic, attach added value to that life because I believe than none of us is in the world by chance, and because I believe that there is a purpose of love for each of us. I understand that this is a fact of faith and that I cannot impose it, even if I try to spread it through my apostolate. But it should be clear that the right to life is a secular value, one that does not have and should not have affiliations or flags, religious or political. We should continue to repeat this.

I think it is necessary, as we go deeper in our reflection on contemporary cultural trends, to use discernment with regard to some ambiguities in meanings, concepts and terms that are very present in the postmodern cultural debate. Examples of these terms and concepts are: secularity and secularism, ethics and reason, science and faith, person and anthropologi-

cal question, human rights and civil rights, bio-politics, the new feminism. By secularity we should understand the possibility given to all citizens to freely express, propose and give witness of their values to the people and to individual citizens (who in their turn are then free to choose), and this reference to their personal ideals and inspirations must not result in their citizenship being prejudicially reduced. Secularity has to have reference to natural law as a common rational basis for all human beings. The first principle of secularity is to seek out the good without prejudice, in a spirit of maximum openness and availability towards others. At the same time it must abandon the old meaning of secularity that comes from the time of the Enlightenment (understood as division and opposition between the State and the Church), which tried to reduce religion to a merely private phenomenon. Only in this way will it be possible to emerge from the drought that it has brought us to, especially in Italy, every time that there are denunciations of real or presumed interference and every time that, rightly or wrongly, secularity is cited. Secularity means that believers too are free to serve everyone.

In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, there is a “secularity issue”, because this freedom is constantly being questioned.

The issue of secularity consists in the fact that the State has difficulty in recognising this freedom, that is to permit, for example, those in public service (in schools, clinics, etc.) which is service for everyone, to do so as believers. It can “allow” it, but only if they adhere to its policies. Therefore it is politics that is asserting its (claimed) primacy over civil society, setting the ethical conditions for the crucial world of families.

Freedom, service to people and families, and religious faith are allowed to citizens, rather than recognised as a primary right. This modifies and distorts the meaning of freedom, the meaning of service and its religious basis. The ambiguity that surrounds the term “secularity” also concerns the term “person”, a term on which it would be worthwhile devoting attention.

THE CONCEPT OF PERSON IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

This summer in Italy a lively debate broke out following the elimination of a healthy twin instead of his brother with Down's syndrome at the San Paolo Hospital in Milan. Pietro Barcellona, lecturer in the philosophy of law in the Faculty of Law in Catania who declared himself to be: "secular, but not anti-religious in principle", was interviewed by the newspaper "Avenire", the main Catholic daily newspaper in Italy, to comment on what had happened. I shall repeat some passages from the interview he gave. "One makes the decision to allow or not to allow a child to be born according to whether the child fits in with the dominant culture, which is that of performance and success. The pre-born child is valued in relation to his/her performances, in this case future, exactly as each of us is valued, not by what we are but by what we produce [...]. At the root of this concept – Barcellona added – there is a vision that denies the human being the privilege of being irreducible to his/her products, that does not recognise in the human being the mystery that he/she is". To a question about the outcomes of the great claim of scientism, Barcellona replies: "If this post-humanist approach should prevail, the human being as conceived by the West will disappear, a space that cannot be reduced to the mechanisms of which it is composed. Consequently, the space of concepts like that of person or that of freedom would also disappear". He concludes: "in view of the present cultural change, we need an alliance between secularists and Catholics who maintain that life and the human person are values to defend, who do not believe in the omnipotence of the individual and who do not accept the arrogance of science".²

These affirmations give rise to, on the one hand, an invitation to be careful not to allow ourselves to be crushed by a functionalist and utili-

² P. VIANA, "Succubi di una cultura individualista", interview with the philosopher Pietro Barcellona, in: *Avvenire*, 28 agosto 2007.

tarian culture that reduces life and conforms people to criteria of performance and success; and on the other hand, the conviction that, in recognising that only by meeting on the level of anthropology – and more precisely on that of a shared concept of the person – is it possible to hold back the advance of the contemporary anti-humanistic drift. The president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Angelo Bagnasco of Genoa, said: "It is this conviction that is the main reason for the cultural project of the Italian Church which has opened up the anthropological question. Far from being abstract and distant, it is fundamental in order to evaluate the concrete questions of personal and social life".³

The "anthropological question" is therefore a fundamental point in any ethical-practical reflection. It is in fact far more than a more-or-less accepted enumeration of the characteristics of the human person and a great deal more than the general call to a sense of respect due to the dignity of the person. We just have to recall the increasing number of debates on the dignity of life and death, with all the questions that derive from this.

The fundamental question is "who is the human being" because the cultural, social and legislative-political answers to this question depend directly on the concept of the human being. A person is not a person because he/she is accepted and recognised. He/she is a "person" because of a personal intrinsic reality. In short, a human being does not become but is "person" from the start of his/her existence.

Those who wish to serve people from the standpoint of faith, and want to go beyond reductive alliances that are humiliating and dull, must have a particular kind of attitude. They must approach people and their demands with the same attitude with which they approach mystery: with amazement and without trying to manipulate. People can

³ A. BAGNASCO, "I vescovi sono con il loro popolo", Introductory speech at the 57th General Assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference, in: *Il Regno-Documenti* 11 (2007), 358.

never be reduced to the mechanisms of which they are composed. It is only by cultivating this attitude that we can be sure of not exhausting the problematic richness and the worrying poverty that always come with people's stories.

It is evident that neither the concept of "secularity" nor that of "person" are unambiguous terms. Pope Benedict XVI is aware of this ambiguity and the need to be careful about their correct use in order to avoid misunderstandings or outright betrayal: "in some cases, the human person [is] marked by permanent dignity and rights that are valid always, everywhere and for everyone, in other cases a person [is marked] with changing dignity and constantly negotiable rights, with regard to content, time and place".⁴ Again with respect to the concept of person, Pope Benedict XVI recalls the existence of a "'weak' vision of the person, which would leave room for every conception, even the most bizarre, [that] only apparently favours peace. In reality, it hinders authentic dialogue and opens the way to authoritarian impositions, ultimately leaving the person defenceless and, as a result, easy prey to oppression and violence".⁵

In bioethical circles, when the term "person" is used ambiguously, it results in grave consequences on the ethical and practical levels. I shall give two examples. The first quotation is by Hugo Tristram Engelhardt: "Not all human beings are persons. Not all human beings are self aware, rational and capable of conceiving the possibility of blame or praise. Fetuses, infants, the profoundly mentally handicapped and sick or injured in an irreversible coma are human but they are not persons".⁶ The second is by Michael Tooley: "an organism possesses a serious right to life only if it possesses the concept of a self as a continuing subject of

⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *The Human Person, the Heart of Peace*, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2007, no. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ H.T. ENGELHARDT, *Manuale di bioetica*, Milano 1999, 159.

experiences and other mental states, and believes that it is itself a continuing entity”.⁷

We immediately realise that the concept of person held by Engelhardt and Tooley is certainly not that used by the whole tradition of personalistic inspiration. It is now necessary to reflect on the concept of person in the light of biopolitical logic, a subject I shall speak of later. We have seen how utilitarians see it as reasonable to consider individuals to be persons only if they have the capacity to express preference. According to the logic of modern biopolitics, the human being, qualified as a non-person, has no possibility of emancipation, given that his/her status does not lie in his/her natural identity, but on the way through which he/she is biopolitically qualified in society.

Jürgen Habermas maintains that if there is less than equality at birth, which is the inevitable outcome of eugenics, it would cause the collapse of the principle on which modern democratic systems are built.

From this, we see the need to define the philosophical parameters that contribute to the correct definition of the person. It needs to be done with rigorous philosophical method, in a way in which there can be total agreement so as to avoid all ambiguity, particularly, for example, with regard to the relationship between person and human being.

You will remember Goethe's character Doctor Faust. We could say that contemporary man is a new Faust, the dominant icon of modernity, devoted totally to the myth of unlimited progress, in an attitude of pride and arbitrariness. The new Faust, blinded by Mephistopheles, is prepared to conquer immortality by selling his soul to the devil and thereby rejecting his conscience.

The contemporary human being appears to be disoriented by induced blindness. Meanwhile at various levels they manage to satisfy their yearning for awareness, and at the same time see their sense of

⁷ M. TOOLEY, “Abortion and infanticide”, in: *Ethical Theory: an Anthology*, ed. RUSS SHAFER-LANDAU, New York 2007, chap. 46.

uneasiness growing in an evident and dramatic way. Individual identity becomes uncertain, insecurity pervades various aspects of daily life, and the bonds of social relations are loosened. There are several areas where the new Faust sees his identity distance itself from the ancient concept of person. The main areas are: the new forms of materialistic evolutionism through indiscriminate and uncritical recourse to genetics and biotechnology; the reduction of the soul to conscience or to an identified personality which is not any better; secularised humanism and the rejection of any reference to the transcendence.

DISTORTED LANGUAGE: WHAT WOMEN ARE NOT TOLD

In the current dominant cultural trends that we are speaking about, a certain kind of language is used as a vehicle of its own thought. In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II reminds us of how language can manipulate. Examples are, in addition to “abortion”, the use of “voluntary interruption of pregnancy” used in the law 194/78 that legalised abortion in Italy, or “reproductive rights” used in the conferences in Cairo and Beijing in order to hide campaigns for contraception and mass abortions.

There is also something we could define as *anti-language*: a word is replaced by another that has less impact on the conscience. In the Italian law mentioned above, the word “mother” never appears, and the title is “social protection of maternity and voluntary interruption of pregnancy”. Why is this term never used? It is because if I say mother, it means that somewhere there is a son or daughter, but they should never be mentioned! The child is actually called a “product of conception”. This is how women have been, and continue to be misled. It is much easier to abort a product of conception than a son or daughter! I have yet to meet a mother who, when expecting her baby, said to her husband: “Darling, I am expecting a product of conception!”, or: “A

blastocyst is nesting inside me”. No. A woman says: “I am expecting a child, I am expecting a baby!”.

This is the first loud signal of John Paul II’s prophetic intuition concerning the deep alliance between women and life. Nowadays they try to deny this alliance, to the extent that the term *woman* is almost in conflict with the terms *life* and *family*. However, this is ideology and not the reality of women or the reality of families. The reality of women is precisely that profound alliance with life!

The manipulation of language is not a trivial matter. When you manipulate language you manipulate minds and consciences, as dramatically described by George Orwell in his novel *1984*. You will remember that the author imagined a dictatorship in which the powers wondered how to keep the populace under submission so that they could not develop ideas like human rights, freedom and democracy. The solution was to eliminate those words from books and from common language because if we do not say a word any more, we gradually lose the very concept of the term. This operation is proceeding with a precise strategy and it is so subtle that we ourselves sometimes find ourselves using anti-language terms without realising it. For example, the fact that we are now constrained, when we speak of family, to add: “I am speaking of family founded on marriage”. This is because the term “family” has lost its true meaning through the variations of its usage. It also happens when we use terms like *heterosexuals*. Who are the heterosexuals? Biology speaks clearly: there is a female biology and a male biology. A couple by definition is heterosexual! Another case: we know well that there are many different ways of coexistence, but we cannot use the term *family* to describe them. When we defend the family we are defending the social values of the family. This is not a private act between two people, but it also has a role of public relevance.

Words are important. We have said so all along. The founding fathers used the word *society* and the concept of society, and this from a juridical point of view has its own characteristic in that the members of a society

have the same goal. It is clear that if society, as it is, has a juridical value, it should be subject to law, and the law of reference is natural law, which is the basis of all other laws. In this whole question let us take, for example, processes for crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis. We know that they were defended by saying that there was a law that ordered them to massacre all the Jews, but they were justly condemned because there is a primary law that must be obeyed and that refers to natural law.

THE DOMINANT CULTURE AND THE EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF AFFECTIVITY

The widespread trend found in the dominant culture of considering a relationship with another to be an obstacle to self-fulfilment and individual rights has brought about, with time, an extension of phenomena that are under the eyes of all, and these include separation, divorce, a drop in the birthrate, surgical and chemical abortion, artificial fertilisation and euthanasia. The problem we are facing today is the existence of a sort of “hypertrophy” of affection, with all the emotional and instinctual components that this entails, often reduced to pure sentimentalism, to “what you feel”, to filling a need to saturation point, and this is to the detriment of the value aspects: the oblatinal, gratitude, the perspective of meaning, and the planning quality. In response to widespread individualism which is incapable of considering the idea of “relationship”, that is, of thinking of what connects people to each other, the Christian community must offer a way of going out to meet the other as a privileged process of growth and self-fulfilment. At the centre of this process we place the family. To speak of the relationality of affective life means to come out of a self-centred logic and to cast oneself in an affective perspective that comes from one’s own personal history, and this requires a long time. It is not “ready made”. Authentic affective life (trust, hope) cannot, by its very nature, be separated from the ethical dimension (loyalty, justice).

In light of all of this, from the viewpoint of service that is increasingly more complete and effective for a person, a couple and a family, it is necessary to make some observations. This is because the serious risk of what we have said directly implicates educational responsibility. We just have to think of the sensitive theme of sex education, closely connected with the theme of education for life: “The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life”.⁸

The emphasis on emotional aspects to the detriment of responsibility also has disruptive effects on the very conception of family, which is often reduced to just another form of human relations based on intimacy and affection. This has led to theories being formed about kinds of “light” bonds that allow the use of rights proper to marriage, but that refuse to commit themselves in aspects like the bond of a promise, and of the reproductive and social obligations of couple relationships. The question of the so-called “co-habiting couples” has been a topical theme in many countries now for the past few years, and it has received new life from recent proposals to proceed to forms of “regularisation” of these relationships.

First of all, we obviously have to recognise that this type of relationship is a fact. It is also evident that the culture of our times has produced ways for couples to live together different from the traditional understanding of family. However, a social phenomenon, even though widespread, is not necessarily a positive thing and the State has the obligation to recognise this. Although we must respect the people who choose to live in this kind of relationship, we cannot fail to point out the weaknesses. The natural physiological expectation of a couple is the procreation of children, and obviously, a healthy psychological development of these children requires a stable and harmonious family atmosphere. We can objectively declare that co-habiting couples are more

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 97.

likely to separate, and this naturally has negative implications for the upbringing of their children. Of course it is far more demanding to build a family than to live together. Marriage implies a series of duties and responsibilities, and it often has to face financial, social and employment difficulties. It is therefore paradoxical that in view of this fact, instead of guiding and encouraging people to freely choose to build a family, in many Western countries they try to get round the problem on the legislative level by recognising situations that are “weak”.

It is well known that laws always have cultural repercussions that are educational or have a negative effect on education, and that they influence and direct customs. It is clear that wherever there is juridical recognition of cohabiting couples, these are more easily accepted by society, and that gives the younger generations a cultural and moral sign that is extremely negative. It gives legitimacy and justification to the problems that many young people experience when making choices in life: insecurity, inability to take on responsibility, inconstancy and emotional instability.

We cannot speak of “denial of rights” when referring to the legislative non-recognition of co-habiting couples. A couple who are not married cannot have the right, for example, to pass over a married couple in lists for allocation of certain social facilities for families (child care, examinations, tax relief, housing, etc.). If they do have this right, then there would be no reason for a young couple today to choose marriage, if through a simple bureaucratic action they receive the same legal recognition as a married couple.

As regards homosexual couples, we need to reflect on this with serenity and not be carried by emotion. We recognise the dignity of homosexual people and the feelings that there can be in this kind of relationship. However, we cannot forget the natural law that sees the family as a natural society founded on marriage, and the centuries-old culture that has one prototype of family, clearly defined, and that must

not be confused with homosexual unions. Otherwise, we would not have greater rights, and all would have fewer certainties. In just one blow we would cancel centuries of history, culture and moral and anthropological traditions, the guardianship of which is at the basis of our future society. What would we be tomorrow if we forgot what we were yesterday? To put it another way: could we exist in the future if we cancelled our past? The answer to these questions is clearly no. What is at stake is not only a law, but the entire assets of our present society, and especially our future society.

With respect to the cultural pressures under way now, that claim that only a few countries, the more “backward”, have no legislation regarding cohabiting couples, including homosexuals, it is worth noting that in Europe, Albania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malta, Moldavia, Monaco, Poland, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine have not approved any laws concerning cohabiting couples. If we go beyond Europe, the situation is even more variable, even among “Western” countries. In practice, a real and proper marriage, including in almost all cases the possibility of adopting, and also open to homosexual couples, is now present in Belgium, Spain, Holland, Massachusetts and in some Canadian provinces.

Neither does membership of the European Union impose dealing with this matter in one way or the other. In fact, this lack of homogeneity shows that there is not at all a common European opinion on the matter. The Court of Justice has actually pointed out this very diversified situation and has called for a distinction to be kept between partner and spouse, and for there to be no community obligations to recognise PACS (civil pact of solidarity) and homosexual marriage.

The Pope has often spoken on the theme of the education of the person, and the training of the intellect, freedom and capacity to love. He considers it to be a fundamental and decisive issue: “From this solicitude for the human person and his/her formation comes our ‘no’

to weak and deviant forms of love and to the counterfeiting of freedom, seen also in the reduction of reason to only what is calculable or manipulatable. In truth, these ‘nos’ are rather ‘yesses’ to authentic love, to the reality of human beings as they have been created by God”.⁹ It is therefore essential to foster education for affectivity, for self-giving and for responsible sexuality. We must put concrete family policies into force that will facilitate these efforts. Of course, we must not forget that the first educators are the parents who hold the primary right and duty to educate. Education in affectivity begins in the family where it is more natural to create a climate of welcome and foster the possibility for communication and relations. “Having given and welcomed life in an atmosphere of love, parents are rich in an educative potential which no one else possesses. In a unique way they know their own children; they know them in their unrepeatable identity and by experience they possess the secrets and the resources of true love”.¹⁰

There is no doubt that the dominant culture strongly influences the younger generations, particularly the adolescents. That is why, at the same time as they receive education in affectivity, parents also need to receive help and instruction, for example concerning the relationship between freedom and responsibility. This relationship is particularly significant in the field of human sexuality which, in its mature expression, defines a person for his/her capacity for self-giving.¹¹ It is a vocation that exists for every Christian before a possible specific vocation to marriage or the consecrated life. However, the family also needs to be supported in its duty to educate and to welcome life. “Although it is true that the future of humanity passes by way of the family, it must be admitted that modern social, economic and cultural conditions make

⁹ BENEDICT XVI, To the participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention of the Church in Italy, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, no. 7.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 16 and 34; see also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2349.

the family's task of serving life more difficult and demanding. In order to fulfil its vocation as the 'sanctuary of life', as the cell of a society which loves and welcomes life, the family urgently needs to be helped and supported. Communities and States must guarantee all the support, including economic support, which families need in order to meet their problems in a truly human way. For her part, the Church must untiringly promote a plan of pastoral care for families, capable of making every family rediscover and live with joy and courage its mission to further the Gospel of life".¹²

Families provide the country with "public assets" that are fundamental for its growth and social cohesion. They must be sustained and promoted as such.

Family policies, therefore, must not be limited to compensating for situations of hardship and suffering. They should be proactive and intervene in the sources and structural nodes of the economy and society.

It is crucial that the isolation and disintegration of families be halted by facilitating and encouraging networks of families to be created between the public, private and private-social sectors.

In synthesis: families need to be reached out to with policies of support and integration and not by substitution, or worse by colonisation, by either the market or the State. What should be done from the beginning is to create the conditions to allow the family to fully carry out its constitutive and founding role, including within the areas of the economy and social organisation. Under this profile the family is not the simple recipient of specialised policies, but represents, especially and above all, a social, civil, juridical, educational, economic and political entity. This means that it is the primary point of reference, as well as the criterion of effectiveness of economic and social policies taken in their entirety.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 94.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MASS MEDIA

Today we find ourselves receiving a number of varied cultural messages, often contradictory and ambiguous, that the various mass media (with the distortion of spectacle at all costs) shower on the very young. They have a power of suggestion that humanity has never been subjected to before now. If we consider the facility with which different ideas circulate and are repeated without any personal commentary, like the attitudes and behaviour that are seen at all levels in all milieus, we cannot avoid feeling dismayed at the spectacle of confusion and disorientation. We have the sensation that society is heading towards a dangerous decline, not only in customs, but more seriously, in thought. We are losing the rules that guide thought. What is the underlying cause? It is the manipulation of minds, which I referred to earlier, that is by far the greatest danger facing the younger generations. Symptomatic of the danger of the situation is the progressive fading of the habit of personal reflection on concepts and issues of an intellectual, moral and social nature. There is subjectivism in judgements and behaviour extended to anyone at all, with the obvious consequences, on the moral level, of the loss of values of reference. An ultimate and also original effect of these phenomena is the obfuscation of the very notion of truth, something that is widespread among young people. Mistakes, ambiguity, modifications made to scientific information, absurdities concealed in various ways, are continuously thrown at us, with the result that people are less able to identify what accords with reason, what is true and what is false. We arrive at the point of not knowing what truth is. We often hear the use of the expression “my truth” and “your truth”. There is no comparison made between opinions because the idea has been uncritically admitted that all opinions are acceptable and it is of no use challenging them. A false concept of tolerance has spread and it is becoming “indifference to choice”. We know that it can be difficult to discover the truth, and so it must be sought with perseverance and humility. How-

ever, to say that opposing declarations can all be true is pure folly. It is therefore urgent that we strive to tear open the thick veil of mistakes that threaten our civilisation and to react to the ideological manipulation that is taking place.

We know that many actions result from messages that are culturally formulated, derive from living conditions, educational approaches, philosophical ideas and social-political projects in the organisation of society. They find fertile ground in which to be planted and put down roots in the daily lives of individuals, children, adolescents and young people.

Educators are entrusted with the demanding task of cultural and ethical discernment in order to help young people to form an upright, mature, free and responsible conscience and to guide their behaviour.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND PRINCIPLES THAT ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE

The current cultural challenges on ethically sensitive topics present us with a panorama of possible epochal earth-shattering proportions. I am not afraid to use the term “epochal”, because the challenge is literally of that nature. There is a violent attack being waged against faith and reason, and, we cannot deny, against Christian thought.

Secularised ideology, formidable powers, the culture of death and powerful economic interests, are based on a fatal mixture that, under the sparkling semblance of emancipation and freedom, is sprinkling a poisonous nectar that is fast reaching its objective of anaesthetising consciences. It is a sort of collective hypnosis that confuses minds and consciences, that cancels out the ability to discern between good and evil, and it paralyses the consequent, necessary and morally binding action that reaches out to proclaim and promote the good and to unmask and combat evil. Good and evil cannot be subjectively debatable.

Sometimes, among the Christian community, someone objects or even shows some embarrassment with respect to the repeated strong declarations by the Pope and the magisterium of the Church on the theme of defending life and the family. I believe that this attitude, justified as being a feature of “adult Catholics”, actually denotes a childish Catholicism. The reference to individual conscience as being grounds for taking a position, actually entails the risk of becoming a sort of self-referentiality. It is true that the formation of conscience to be upright, mature, free and responsible is part of the personal process of every Christian, but it is also true that, without constant comparison with objective truth and the good, it cannot be said to be protected from subjective and relativistic interpretations.

On what can we draw for correct discernment if not on the magisterium of the Church?

The Church, as Mother and Teacher, not only has the right and duty to speak out on morally sensitive topics, but it also has the task of pointing out to the consciences of individuals, believers and non-believers, the way of righteousness and truth, and to light up the path with its wisdom and to encourage them to action with its invitation to hope. At the fourth national ecclesial convention of the Church in Italy, which I attended as a delegate from the diocese of Rome, the Pope’s speech was, for us laity, particularly strong and clear: “We must always be ready to give a response (apo-logia) to whoever asks us the reason (logos) for our hope [...] We must do it all the time, on the level of thought and action, of personal behaviour and public witness”,¹³ and give witness to a faith that is combined with intelligence.

Let us listen to these strong clear words from Pope Benedict XVI and the magisterium! If we are truly “adult” Catholics, we cannot help but be immensely grateful for this help. There is a repeated call to

¹³ BENEDICT XVI, To the participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention of the Church in Italy, *op. cit.*

mobilisation to defend the family and human life to which we want to respond as believers and citizens.

However, the question is this: if it is true, and it is true, that the defence and advancement of the family and life are not and should not be the prerogative of any one religious faith or political belief, how should the public witness of Catholics take place? What is their role in the current cultural and political situation in view of the present-day challenges?

On the occasion of the diocesan convention of Rome on 9 June 2004 entitled “Family, be what you are in the Church and in society”, Cardinal Vicar Camillo Ruini said: “We have plenty to do with two basic facts: the first is that the family is an essential good for human beings and specifically for Christians; the second fact is that the family and life are increasingly a topic of public debate and in this sense political, for the transformation of customs and behaviour and for the development of biotechnology. These two factors cause the family and life to be put forward as topics for public debate, and this has become of primary importance in the more developed countries. We sometimes have the impression, as a Christian community, that if we deal with these issues, we are involving ourselves in something that pertains to politics, economics, etc., but not to us as Christians. This is a serious mistake because these topics fully pertain to our responsibility as Christians, given that they put into play the values and structures that support both human coexistence and Christianity”.¹⁴

Even earlier, in the *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, Cardinal Ratzinger, quoting from *Christifideles Laici*, recalled the basic teachings of the Second Vatican Council: “the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation

¹⁴ C. RUINI, “Famiglia diventa ciò che sei... nella Chiesa e nella società”, Conclusion of the Diocesan Convention, 7-9 June 2004, in: *Rivista diocesana di Roma*, Year XI, July-October 2004, n. 4-5, 816.

in ‘public life’, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good”.¹⁵

The *Note* continues: “When political activity comes up against moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation, the Catholic commitment becomes more evident and laden with responsibility. In the face of fundamental and inalienable ethical demands, Christians must recognize that what is at stake is the essence of the moral law, which concerns the integral good of the human person. This is the case with laws concerning abortion and euthanasia [...]. Such laws must defend the basic right to life from conception to natural death. In the same way, it is necessary to recall the duty to respect and protect the rights of the human embryo. Analogously, the family needs to be safeguarded and promoted, based on monogamous marriage between a man and a woman, and protected in its unity and stability in the face of modern laws on divorce: in no way can other forms of cohabitation be placed on the same level as marriage, nor can they receive legal recognition as such. The same is true for the freedom of parents regarding the education of their children; it is an inalienable right recognized also by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights”.¹⁶

One of the operations of deception that is taking place in our times, concerns human rights and civil rights. There is a substantial difference between human rights and civil rights. The plundering of culture that we face is that civil rights are being passed off as human rights, and huge battles have been fought over this. The first human right is the right to life. Other human rights are the dignity, identity and integrity of the person, and freedom of conscience and religion. Human rights are

¹⁵ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

“inherent” to human beings, and no majority or majority context can change that. This is the difference.

Civil rights are subject to a majority, but human rights cannot ever be so. This gives rights to minorities, and they cannot be democratically cancelled.

No majority has ever legitimised genocide.

Once again the Holy Father reminds us that: “Special attention and extraordinary commitment are demanded today by those great challenges that endanger vast portions of the human family: war and terrorism, hunger and thirst, some terrible epidemics. But it is also necessary to face, with equal determination and clear policies the risks of political and legislative choices that contradict fundamental values and anthropological principles and ethics rooted in the nature of the human being, in particular, regarding the guardianship of human life in all its stages, from conception to natural death, and to the promotion of the family founded on marriage, avoiding the introduction in the public order of other forms of union that would contribute to destabilising it, obscuring its particular character and its irreplaceable role in society”.¹⁷

“Determination and clear policies”, therefore, on non-negotiable principles are qualities that should define the cultural and political commitment of Catholics.

Recently, in the international debate on bioethical topics, a new term appeared: biopolitics. This is the legislative spin-off from bioethical issues, a context in which it would really be more appropriate to use the term bio-rights.

The term biopolitics expresses the phenomenon – typically modern – of the total takeover of responsibility and management of biological life by the authorities. This does not refer only to the institutions of power, but to any self-referential collective that justifies itself only on

¹⁷ BENEDICT XVI, To the participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention of the Church in Italy, *op. cit.*

the level of praxis and does not assume that real objectivity is a right and proper principle of reference.

From this perspective, bioethics would come before biopolitics. They maintain that once formulation takes place, after in-depth bioethical debate, of suitable ideological convergence on specific issues, they should be transferred to biopolitics, according to the normal dialectics that are standard in politics: debates in civil and parliamentary society, possible legislative proposals, controls to ensure constitutionality, and possible referendums.

Biopolitics, in synthesis, maintains that human life and biology is not a presupposition, but a product of praxis.

The pervasiveness of biopolitics is alarming. I shall give just a few examples:

– There is the almost global legalisation of abortion: forty one percent of the world population live in countries where the practice has been legalised. According to the World Health Organisation, every year in the world fifty three million abortions take place. That means that every year we have a number of victims equal to all those who died in the Second World War. This legislative process, which took place in a very short time-frame, was portrayed, at least in the West, as consolidating a democratic model. It is an evident sign of the power with which biopolitics claims to manage life, by authorising its existence or at least by giving it social legitimisation. Abortion, in a widespread biopolitical context, has acquired new “symbolic” value by claiming to be recognised as a fundamental right.

– We have the issue of spare embryos being frozen, the result of techniques of artificial fertilisation. It is significant that, from a biopolitical viewpoint, this specific problem has difficulties in even being perceived: the United Kingdom ordered the periodic destruction of these embryos, independently of any controls to verify their viability and without being able to put forward any justification – beyond the political – for that practice.

– There is a distortion in the balance between the sexes at birth, a phenomenon produced by selective abortions (particularly in India and China), and this now seems to testify to the frightening number of one hundred million women who have not been born. This is a real demographic nightmare. India became aware of this some years ago, and China only in recent months. However, the ratio between newborn boys and newborn girls is one hundred and nineteen per cent above the international average of one hundred and seven. The remedies chosen by those countries (penal repression for selective abortions, prohibition of prenatal tests to identify the sex of the child) are all clearly ineffective, because the root of the problem is precisely in the very rigid biopolitical legislation of family planning.

– We have the situation of old people that no Welfare State will be able to care for as long as we have biopolitical phenomena like the rise in the average life span and the highly disabling degenerative conditions of senility.

– There is a drive towards the legalisation of euthanasia that is found in almost all Western countries and likely to extend to the rest of the world. In the same way as for abortion, euthanasia has become a homicidal action under biopolitical management of the end of human life. In biopolitics, the subject of euthanasia as assisted suicide is more than widespread. In Holland, thirty one per cent of pediatricians suppress the life of malformed newborns, even without the permission of the parents. In Switzerland last February, the Supreme Court declared that the mentally ill have a constitutional right to be eliminated.

– There is the spread of animalistic ideologies, that are no longer able to distinguish between human and animal dignity, given that, in biopolitics, life does not allow for ontological differences (see the new animalistic laws approved in the Balearic Islands, on the recognition of fundamental rights for primates).

It is therefore necessary to escape from the devastating concept of biopolitics, even if we have no guarantee that the deconstruction of biopolitics can help the arrival of more reassuring alternatives. Of course, in order to transcend biopolitics, it is essential to activate strong commitment for the defence of the personal dimension of life. This means, on the one hand, recognition of the intrinsic, pre-political, value of life, and on the other, a clear refusal of any public modifications of biological categories, beginning with those concerning life and death, and to never accept that they be politically determined.

In short, that which has acquired negative value in modernity, like fragility, has to be reclaimed as a fundamental anthropological principle that can activate, within modernity itself, other ways of respecting life. This does not mean, naturally, that we accept practices of withdrawal with respect to life. It is more a case of setting in motion ever new ways of commitment, not by starting out with politically directed decisions, but from the urgency that arises from life itself.

According to biopolitical logic, fragility becomes a dialectic term to be overcome. It is precisely the extraordinary possibilities that could be opened by the inclusion of mechanics in biology (like cybernetic organisms) that disseminate the scientific illusion of always being able to extend the limits of the biological survival of individuals, promising them an indefinitely long life span.

Biopolitical authority has the single aim of influential power, and so it denies and fights fragility. In this way it empties the individuality of life of any sense and any relevance. Biopolitical strategy against fragility is noticeable: fragile people in the biopolitical perspective are those who should first be denounced as such, and then possibly be “repaired” (where feasible), and ultimately substituted, naturally after it has been declared that they are unworthy to live and their destruction has been programmed.

The task facing our generation is first of all that of discerning and unmasking the reality of a pervasive and impersonal power, and that of opposing any form of biopolitical ratification.

WOMEN BETWEEN FAMILY AND PUBLIC ROLE

How can we actually deal with the problem of making family and work compatible? Or how should we not deal with it? The second answer is not difficult: leave each family to sort it out themselves. This means that in almost all cases the problem is left to the women, wives, mothers, daughters of elderly parents. At the same time they go out to work for reasons that range from the need to have another salary coming in to pay the family expenses, to the needs to socialise and have a public role in society. These latter reasons mostly pertain to young women, but if they wish to enter the labour force, they may have to delay marriage and the birth of the first child, and maybe they will have to renounce having a second child.

Compatibility between family and work is assured by women who thus sustain growing costs on both fronts. Their professional job may become more complex, demanding, difficult and stressful. Their role as caregiver progressively involves more tasks to be done, and relationships to be maintained with others who compete to provide primary services that families need. These rising costs can imply different things for women. They may have to renounce a demanding job that is rewarding and stimulating, and move to a position that is residual, marginal, underpaid and discriminatory, with lower levels of protection. This is the case of part-time work which is a voluntary disqualifying option, but accepted because it offers the only way of taking up employment. This happens when you return to work after having given it up for the birth of a child. This return – if it happens – means starting off again from zero, if not from an even more disadvantaged position. When living family life in a stressed way, with tasks of care-giving, often simultaneously with children and elderly parents, there is an anxious search to fill in situations with extemporaneous and onerous means. The cost of this state of affairs is burdensome at the family and social levels. Women's work overload could destroy opportunities for a family

life that is rich in meaning and deny society essential resources and skills for balanced growth.

What are the factors to which we must ascribe all of this? We can refer to at least two situations. The first concerns the current situation of the labour market and the companies for which women's style of work is regarded as costly, risky and not very dependable. The second is connected to the vision of social politics that pays little attention to the needs of families, especially those with young children, and those with elderly people needing care. They offer little financial support, few opportunities to help people balance family responsibilities and active participation in the workforce, and few real services for small children together with an organisation that takes no account of real subsidiarity.

What is the cultural climate that has established this state of affairs? We are witnessing recurring trivialisation and uncritical stereotypes: "if a family functions badly it is because the woman is working outside the home, and if a woman at work does not work as well as she should it is because she is thinking of the family".

At the time when feminism first appeared, we suffered a real and proper cultural hammering. They tried to tell women that the only way to be fulfilled was to work at a job outside the home. Nowadays many are convinced that families break up because women work outside the home. Who is right? I think that the point is elsewhere. Women are human beings. They are not fulfilled by doing things but, exactly as happens with men, they are fulfilled when their inner plan coincides with their life in practice. In other words, fulfilment is not found in accumulating goods and objects, or by taking on responsibilities and roles that are more or less public. It is given by the ability or possibility that we are given to adhere to our inner plan, to become exactly what we want to be. This is the urgency today to allow families and women to choose. They can choose whether or not to plan on having a new baby, for example. How many couples today can make a free choice without conditioning or pressures?

Europe is going through a demographic winter. Italy is the country with the lowest birth rate in the world with 1.2 children per woman. But how many women today can choose, once the baby is born, to stay at home for the first three years to look after the child? How many can give their children into the care of grandmothers, aunts or other relatives? Why are there not enough childcare facilities? For what reason can a woman not return to the workforce after the child reaches the age of three? They may have to retrain, but they should not be relentlessly excluded as happens today. This is a society that does not welcome mothers. A society that does not facilitate motherhood brings nothing good.

In a resolution by the Council of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Union (23 June 2000) we read that “motherhood, fatherhood and the rights of young children are eminent social values that must be protected by society, by the member states, by the European community”.

Fertility and school attendance are essential for the health of the economy and business. Business cannot develop in a society undergoing demographic crisis. Experience shows us that periods of stagnation and demographic decline coincide with periods of economic and social decline. We know that in Europe there are too few children in relation to the number necessary. Favourable conditions should be created in order to welcome them. There should be sustained collective responsibility with regard to birthrate.

If families, motherhood and fatherhood are “eminent social values”, essential for the development of the whole community, then efforts to care for them are not merely private affairs but are enriching for the whole country. Neither market conveniences nor bureaucratic regulation sovereignty will go downhill. On the contrary, they should be able to interact with the various dimensions of civil life in order to have a more balanced society and economy that must not be deprived of possibilities of undertaking these care-giving activities. What are needed

are policies, measures and action to facilitate and foster conditions that will reconcile family and employment. In the social agreement between business, trade unions and government, an explicit place could be found for flexibility with a “family format”, one that is intended to produce a better quality of life for families and the workplace. Businesses that invest in that way (for example, by providing creches) could find compensation in terms of tax reductions, and contractual and insurance policies could be studied that would cover periods of absence from work connected to specific events in the family.

EVANGELIUM VITAE AND THE “NEW FEMINISM”: A CALL TO WOMEN

“In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It is up to them to promote a ‘new feminism’ which rejects the temptation of imitating models of ‘male domination’, in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation”.¹⁸

To be honest, the term “feminism” has never appealed to me. In fact, I have never particularly liked it at all. Although it has undeniably produced positive results, perhaps I have experienced the exploitation of that movement by a certain cultural area that took over the right to speak on behalf of all women. They made it become an ideological banner to push an image of women as enemies of life, a fact that is far from the truth.

The feminism that I came to know when we were voting on the law 194/78 that legalised abortion in Italy, shouted its hammering slogans with aggressiveness and intolerance typical of those who do not search for real solutions. They only wish to impose their own opinions. Thirty

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 99.

years later, an extreme form of feminism, increasingly more inflexible, shouted out the same slogans with the same intolerance of people who do not want to find real solutions, but who continue to impose their own cultural pattern. In the meantime, the people who proclaim life have increased with thousands of volunteers, mostly women. So, which is the real feminism? On the one hand we have a cold and systematic attempt to break up the deep alliance between woman and life. This is a profound rupture in the feminine psyche. It stigmatises the heart, sometimes irreversibly, and certainly impoverishes all of humanity, as when a baby is not given the chance to be born. The number in Italy today is four million eight-hundred babies who have been prevented from living, and hundreds of thousands of women who have been misled and have had their dignity hurt. On the other hand, when we separate women and life, we are putting at risk the boundless resources that this deep alliance brings with it. The number in Italy today is eighty thousand babies helped to be born and tens of thousands of women welcomed and whose dignity has been respected.

I believe that true feminism is that which should call society and institutions to take on the responsibility that the social welfare of motherhood requires. I am very aware that the subject of the new feminism does not only touch on the aspect of motherhood, but it is unfortunately true that it is on this aspect that the most bitter attack is being concentrated by those who claim to be its exclusive representatives. Certainly the protection of the right to life is an obligation for everyone, men and women. However, as the debate is generally conducted by the extreme feminism referred to earlier, it is necessary that there be a new kind of feminism, one that can communicate a submerged culture that is very much present but that is without a voice. In January 2003, a powerful initiative by women united for life arose in Italy. They presented a “manifesto of the new feminism”. Going beyond the text, I thought of the courageous women who have faced a difficult maternity and the women who have helped them to overcome the difficulties.

Women have joined who are opinion leaders in the world of culture and entertainment, women engaged in institutions, from Parliament to the smallest local authorities, from various political affiliations, women from the academic and journalistic worlds, and all the women who felt that this was their place.

On 22 May 2003, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth sad anniversary of law number 194/78 which legalised abortion in Italy, John Paul II again returned to this theme which was close to his heart: “I renew, especially to you women, my invitation to defend the alliance between women and life, and to promote a new feminism”.¹⁹

FREE TO WELCOME LIFE

I would like to conclude my reflection by telling you a story.

Anna unexpectedly arrived at the offices of the Rome Movement for Life, and she expressed her desire to work as a volunteer. Her face was expressive, but there seemed to be sadness in her eyes. “For years I have tried to pluck up the courage to come here. I have read and reread *Evangelium Vitae*, to the point of crumpling it up, but finally I have come!” Then she told her story: “I have two children of six and eight years of age. I have always believed in women’s fight for freedom and I have taken part in all the demonstrations, gatherings and initiatives that demanded the right of women to have an abortion. I was among those who wrote ‘free abortion!’ on walls. It is only a lump of cells, they told me. It is a lump of cells, I told others when I accompanied them to the abortion clinic. It is a lump of cells, I told myself when I discovered I was pregnant and went to have an abortion. Then I got married, and after some time we decided to have a baby. After a month and a half I

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Members of the Italian Pro-life Movement*, 23 May 2003.

went for an ultrasound. I felt the heart of my baby beating ... and my world fell apart! In a few seconds I remembered all the lies, whispers and shouts. I had been deceived! And how many women had I deceived! This should never happen again. You must stop it. You must tell everyone! I ask you to give me the chance to tell my story so that no more women may be deceived!” While she spoke her eyes filled with tears for that lost child, for that abortion performed ten years earlier but that seemed to have been yesterday. There is a kind of amnesia that, every time the subject of life enters public debate, unfailingly, like a carbon copy that has been repeated for years, a few groups of women, amplified by newspapers and television, dance and sing to the same refrain: “Hands off the abortion law. The right to abortion is a breakthrough for women. No turning back”. Unfortunately, there is no turning back. More than four million babies in Italy, because of that “breakthrough”, will never sing and dance. Hundreds of thousands of women will carry sadness in their hearts like Anna. At a recent pro-life gathering, a group of extreme feminists tried to interrupt the sessions with the same slogans that were used thirty years ago and they shouted at the six hundred participants that they were “murderers!”. There was a women in the room holding her baby in her arms, and she said, full of emotion: “my child is here today and that is thanks to you. Thank you!”. To support women and mothers in their role of welcoming and accompanying life is an important thing not only for women, but also for society that would otherwise be poorer in hope and have a poorer future. Most male politicians say nothing, and that is not a good thing. Men should all understand that the battle to defend the right to life should not regard differences in sex, religion or political belief. However, through tacit agreement, they leave that territory to their women colleagues. Those who have space in the great means of communication – always the same – assume an arrogant tone as they speak for women. They continue to recite the same refrains that they learned as young women in the feminist parades, pushing their stale message as some-

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thing new, modern and broad-minded. Unfortunately, many of those who have not been part of that culture, and who find that they have a different position on other themes, when they have to face the subject of abortion they take refuge in common places, as if they suffered from a sort of cultural inferiority complex. It is as if to say that if a woman, and more so a woman politician, were to speak in defence of a baby who has been conceived, then she is “intolerant, fundamentalist, behind the times, etc.”. This is how politics distances itself from the real experiences of women. Where is that something new, that specific contribution, the feminine genius? Can it not be expressed in policies at the service of life and the family? Of course it can. There are testimonies, still few, but that are increasing in any case. It is an awareness that should be declared: that the laws that legalise abortion are a defeat for women and for all of society. This awareness should arise from facts: a general mobilisation of consciences and of institutions that sustain life, women, families, and people’s dignity. Our generation can achieve an epochal change of direction where there is no discrimination between humans, born or unborn, equal opportunities between strong and weak, rich and poor, healthy and disabled. It is this historical and cultural process in which everyone, men and women, can take part, where women can give an essential contribution. Women can bring it to term, or, dramatically the opposite, destroy it. We should always side with life in order to find ourselves, in order to generate a more mature and just society, to help other women to be free and to welcome life.

The reduction of femininity to an object of consumerism

HELEN ALVARÉ*

INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to reflect upon the closely related phenomena of consumerism and the objectification of women as they manifest themselves particularly in North America. In many ways, these phenomena are an “old story”: women reduced to flesh versus spirit or intellect. Many cultures around the globe and over time have internalized this view of women; North America by no means has a monopoly on what Pope Benedict XVI referred to just a month ago as the simultaneous “false glorification” and “defilement” of the female human body.¹

And yet, North America does seem unique in the way that it *combines* rampant consumerism with the objectification of women. It is part of the “dark side” of our continent’s deserved reputation as a place of economic and social opportunity. This dark side is growing so large, that it is threatening to swallow much of what is good about our approach to freedom and opportunity. Perhaps one of the most important reasons for the size of our problems in this area concerns our highly developed technological and media industries and culture. Tech-

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¹ Agence France Press, “Benedict decries ‘faith deficit’”, *Washington Times* (USA), A9, Jan 1, 2008.

nological innovations drive a substantial portion of our economies. These innovations regularly arise in the area of media: our ability to broadcast to each other and to the world, constant, loud and dramatic images, including artificially-perfected, sexually-charged images of women.

The movement toward transforming women into consumer objects has corresponded with a period of exploding public and private opportunities for women. There is greater equality in education, in the workplace, and even in many personal relationships. Sadly, however, much of this progress has been built on shaky foundations, in particular upon aspirations that women behave as little differently from (often, caricatures of) men as possible, including regarding sex, parenthood, and a general will to dominate persons with whom they come into contact.

In my remarks today, I will describe the phenomena of objectification and consumerism. Second, I will suggest what's "new" and really more ominous about the current situation for women and society, according to the following points: one, women's increasing cooperation with their own subjugation, sometimes via particular types of feminist movements; and two, the legal and social institutionalization of these phenomena, under the rubric of an ill-conceived "freedom", and with particularly disastrous effects upon the poor. Finally, I will suggest how the Catholic teaching, found in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and other recent documents attending to women's situation, provide ways of thinking and speaking about consumerism and objectification which might find a receptive audience.

PHENOMENA OF THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN AND CONSUMERISM

It can be said that women are "objectified" when they are treated or portrayed as things, versus persons. Things by their nature are valued variably according to features such as beauty or functionality. Things

are also intuitively valued less than persons. How often does a parent say to a child who has just had an accident with, for example, the family car: “It’s only a ‘thing’, we’ll get over it. Thank God you’re alright”.

Persons are also “objectified” when they are understood to lack the gifts God gives to persons alone. The gifts of being “willed for [her] own sake,² of being made in God’s image and likeness as a subject, a free, willing, acting being possessed of rationality, creativity and free will. The gift of being made from love and for eternal co-existence, in love, with God.

Another aspect of God’s image and likeness denied by objectification involves the intrinsically relational aspect of every human life. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II writes: “Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in [...] relation to the other ‘I’”.³ Relationships involve giving and receiving – in John Paul II’s language, “mutual donation” – which is regularly sacrificial.⁴ Once a woman is “objectified,” she is no longer understood as meriting or capable of a true “relationship”, of sacrificial donation.

Finally, women are “objectified” by being identified solely with their bodies. Our souls are either ignored or explicitly “disembodied”. This is done often with language and images purporting to value or admire our bodies. In truth, however, these artificially split our identities, and result inevitably in degrading us. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*: “This is hardly man’s great ‘yes’ to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. [...] The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness”.⁵

² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24.

³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 5.

Regarding the phenomenon of consumerism, there are two aspects to consider in connection with the situation of women today. The first is closely connected with the phenomenon of objectification. John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* describes this consumerism succinctly as: an “excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups”; and the desire for the “multiplication or continual replacement of the things already owned with others still better, which involves much ‘throwing-away’ and ‘waste’”. “An object already owned but now superceded by something better is discarded, with no thought of its possible lasting value in itself, nor of some other human being who is poorer”. It is the triumph of ‘having’ over ‘being’, though having things cannot “in itself perfect the human subject, unless it contributes to [...] the realization of the human vocation as such”.⁶ This is a near-perfect description of the North American situation; one might perhaps refine the description to add our dedication to owning the most recent technological innovations, and luxury forms of goods, as signals of status.

Again, it can be noted how North American consumerism is a kind of dark side to our national advantages. The continent was built up in large part by risk-taking immigrants, and has held itself out as a beacon of economic opportunity for centuries. Sadly, we have come to measure our progress and world status in monetary terms. We have also exported this way of thinking via constant and influential media portrayals of the claimed association between wealth, happiness and beauty.

It was almost inevitable in this environment that human beings

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 28, citing Paul VI's encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*, no. 19: “Increased possession is not the ultimate goal of nations or of individuals. All growth is ambivalent [...]. The exclusive pursuit of possessions thus becomes an obstacle to individual fulfillment and to man's true greatness...both for nations and for individual men, avarice is the most evident form of moral underdevelopment”; see also PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, no. 9 in: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 (1971), 407f.

would become the “ultimate” consumer product. Everyone intuitively feels that persons are more valuable than “things” even if their thinking is otherwise highly corrupted or illogical. Women’s physical beauty and sexual complementarity with men make them particularly desirable in a commercial economy dominated by male leadership. The money to be made on sexualized images of women is staggering. It is conservatively estimated in fact today that the U.S. pornography industry is worth between 10 and 20 billion dollars annually. The world figure is about 60 billion dollars.⁷ It is further estimated that pornography attracts 40% of all Internet users in the U.S. at least once a month, 70% of male Internet users between ages 18 and 34, and half of all hotel patrons.⁸

The treatment of women as consumer objects is not by any means limited to the pornography context. Advertising is replete with degrading images of women. Explicitly sexual images sell underwear, of course, but even couches, bathroom tiles and cars. John Paul II’s 1994 *Letter to Women* noted this when it singled out the “widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality and corrupts even very young girls into letting their bodies be used for profit”.⁹

There is a second aspect of North American consumerism which affects the dignity of women. It is the explicit encouraging of women to acquire more “stuff”, especially objects and services that might make them more physically attractive. Indeed, the changing economic situations for women in North America – the move away from heavy manufacturing industry to service jobs, combined with women’s higher education and lower numbers of children – has led to a massive increase in women’s individual wealth. In response, advertisers hype cosmetic sur-

⁷ Cf. JASON BYASSE, “Not Your Father’s Pornography”, in: *First Things*, January 2008, no. 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Women*, no. 5.

gery, expensive clothes, jewelry and makeup, directly to female consumers. In North America, a certain form of cosmetic surgery post-childbirth, going by the name of a “mommy job”, is performed upon perfectly healthy women thousands of times a year, to erase all of the “side effects” of pregnancy. This trend to tempt women to greater consumption is well captured in an advertising campaign sponsored by the diamond industry. Entitled “the right hand ring” campaign, it urges women to flaunt their status, power and money by buying a “right hand” diamond ring for themselves (as opposed to the wedding ring they would traditionally wear on their left hand).

All in all, the move toward transforming women into consumer objects is quite far along in North America. As noted above, this tendency has always existed in some form. Yet it has particularly disturbing characteristics today which I will take up now.

DISTURBING SIGNS OF THE TIMES

a) *Women conniving in their own subjection*

In his Theology of the Body series of talks, and in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II discusses original sin’s effect upon women. He repeats the words that God “addressed to the woman” after the commission of the first sin: “*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*” (Gen 3:16). He interprets this as indicating that the woman develops an “insatiable desire for a different union”. It is not for a relationship of communion, but a “relationship of possession of the other as the object of one’s own desire”.¹⁰ Even a secular observer would have to conclude that women’s cooperation, even encourage-

¹⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, General Audience of June 25, 1980, in: *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (John S. Grabowski, foreword), 1997, 123.

ment in the objectification of their bodies today, seems a modern manifestation of this inclination which Catholics call “original sin”. Women debasing themselves in pursuit of the belief that it will lead to union with a man. Again, this is not confined to the pornography industry, or even to commercial advertising or films or television. Rather, ordinary women across the continent buy clothing designed to emphasize or expose the parts of their bodies associated with sex. I have often joked with my husband that I might have to institute a “no cleavage before 9am” rule with my female students, so much do their low cut shirts distract the male students in my morning classes. Many women often also debase themselves with their speech, or by exposing themselves to media which gradually desensitizes them to the proposal that women are beautiful, sexualized objects for consumption.

The push for women to become such objects starts early in their lives. With sleazy dolls and clothes offered to small girls, and movies aimed at children which convey a message that beauty is the ticket to wealth and happiness. A particularly heavy dose of such messages is served at a particularly formative time of a woman’s life: her adolescence, when a girl’s beauty is emerging in its adult form. A plethora of magazines, movies, and even sexual education courses, invites adolescent girls to see themselves as bodies only. Mothers regularly cooperate with these trends, as any Catholic school principal will tell you after confronting mothers who have sent their daughters to school functions wearing completely unacceptable clothing purchased by the mother.

A final and disturbing aspect of women’s conniving in their own objectification is the involvement of prominent strains of feminism who insist that they are striking a blow for women’s freedom by identifying freedom with undisciplined sexuality. This is particularly true of the Western feminism of the late 20th century, which is still influential today. On the one hand, one can see how strong was the temptation to break women out of the limited roles assigned to them in earlier times, and to give them the “upper hand” over men; marriage and mother-

hood were constantly portrayed as lesser vocations suited to lesser intelligences. But this feminism's response was and remains fundamentally flawed for three reasons. First, the notion of freedom it promotes is at odds with human nature and aspirations, a conclusion which might be reached by common sense, and which is also confirmed by Catholic teaching, as discussed at greater length in the final section of these remarks. Freedom characterized by individualism, and the rejection of truth, solidarity and transcendence, is no real freedom. The histories of individuals and of nations confirm this.

Second, this feminism drew upon the worst features of male behavior for its prescriptions. Thus was the feminist woman urged to be a sexually adventurous, marriage- and children-spurning, money-and-career-driven, creature. Another way of putting this, as will be discussed later, is to say that feminism urged women to imitate the male "version" of original sin – domination – to attain equality and happiness.

Third, this feminist response constituted a tremendous opportunity cost for women. During the late 20th century, feminists had a golden opportunity – not easily recreated – to address women's needs in the world. As the decades passed, and it became clear that feminists were too easily derailed by the "dream of power", too disdainful of God to reach ordinary folk, too fearful of acknowledging common sense, and too willing even to harm the vulnerable (*e.g.* via abortion), their organized influence waned tremendously. The longing for women's equality and dignity lives on, but more in the hearts of individual women than in a larger group likely more capable of demanding some of the structural changes women need.

In sum, the degree to which women, individually and via organized groups, have embraced their own objectification as consumer items is a particularly disturbing feature of our current situation.

b) *Institutionalization in family law of the notion of women as consumer objects*

The view of women as consumer objects has, oddly, come to be institutionalized not only in U.S. media and commerce, but also more and more in the law concerning, sex, marriage and the family. I say “oddly”, because this development has coincided with the strengthening of laws protecting women against rape, include rape within marriage and in the context of “date rape”. There has also occurred the strengthening of laws protecting women against “sexual harassment”, and “stalking”, and “domestic violence”. Apparently, however, and due likely to deep misunderstandings about the nature of “freedom”, advocates for women do not understand that there is such a thing as good versus bad choices in the context of “consensual” sexual relationships too, not just non-consensual ones. Thus have certain influential feminists, and others, helped enact laws about sex, marriage and families, affirming the objectification of women as consumer objects. Some of the following family law trends are among the most important in this regard.

First, was the move to “no-fault” divorce. This was urged on the claim that marriage is inherently subjugating of women, who ought to be able to escape it quickly and easily. Not surprisingly, this was followed by a massive increase in the divorce rate, as men traded older women for younger, and also as women decided that the union they craved was not sufficiently satisfying, and began to file for divorce more often than men.

A second example is the call for legal recognition of any type of grouping that wishes to call itself a family. Even groups like cohabitants, characterized by their explicit rejection of definitive commitment to one another. Many female scholars lead this effort. At the same time, though, sociologists and economists are amply documenting how such relationships are characterized by men’s and women’s lower levels of

practical care for one another and even for their own children. This is associated with the fact that persons in uncommitted sexual relationships are “testing” and measuring one another for suitability, versus seeking long-term communion *per se*.

A third area of the law in which the objectification of women has become institutionalized concerns assisted reproductive technologies. U.S. law in particular has left it nearly completely to the market to sort out the purchase and sale of women’s eggs and wombs. (It defers similarly to the market regarding male sperm.) This is not because the risks and harms to women are unknown. Risky hormonal injections over several weeks, coaxing a woman’s ovaries to produce 10 or more eggs in a single month’s cycle, are common features of egg donation. Surrogate motherhood, under certain conditions, is also legal in Canada and the U.S. While “paid surrogacy” is legally forbidden in Canada and some U.S. states, this does not stop those involved from treating the mother in the manner of a consumer object. For one thing, individuals regularly find ways around the law to actually pay the surrogate for her egg or womb or both. Second, women’s appearances, accomplishments, and past gestational successes are touted to make them attractive “products” for buyers. Finally, participants often insist that love and generosity are the primary motivations, but it is impossible to discount the role played by large sums of money, or to discount the regular stories about poor women from second or third world countries, offering their eggs and wombs to rich westerners in exchange for money badly needed by their families.

It should be noted that the objectification of women as a feature of North American law has particularly harmful effects upon women. Wealthier women, feminists and cultural icons assure the public that the “good life” and “female empowerment” includes adorning and exposing your body for the benefit of the male populace. Poor women – often with few other options given their lesser education and their more frequently dysfunctional family situations – grasp more often at

this proffered shortcut to acceptance, admiration and “love”, however brief. In an important and deeply troubling article by a leading American sociologist (Andrew Cherlin), he described the phenomenon of the “deinstitutionalization of marriage” among poor women. That is, such women see marriage not as an institution with its own realities and rules to aspire to, but rather as a “thing” to be achieved which includes: obtaining a more or less enforceable trust from a man, alongside access to a certain level of wedding celebration, house, furniture and car. Results of this sort of “marriage-as-consumer-item” thinking are devastating. The women who adopt this view are far more likely to rear a child out of wedlock, remain on welfare, cohabit, suffer abuse at the hands of a boyfriend, have an abortion, never marry, or if they marry, divorce.

Respecting every law discussed above, there are female as well as male “experts” who argue that the law empowers women – to leave unsatisfying marriages, undertake a sexual relationship with the person of their choice, or earn money from reproductive materials and capacities. In every case, however, the “experts” have misunderstood or ignored the nature of persons, particularly female persons, and the overarching purposes of human life. A Christian anthropology, particularly as developed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, does not fail to grasp these matters. It does so, too, in a way that may be persuasive beyond the bounds of the Catholic faith.

A MODERN CATHOLIC RESPONSE

Catholic tradition has a great deal to offer in response to the intertwined phenomena of the objectification of women and consumerism. This has been particularly true over the last 30 years, beginning with John Paul II’s Theology of the Body series, and continuing with *Mulieris Dignitatem* and other important documents. John Paul II’s and

Benedict XVI's thoughts appeared at a time when the weaknesses and even corruption of earlier feminist proposals were becoming more evident. Through their work, the Church offers a way of hope and a way of life bound to appeal to our human nature, even if it is not yet sufficiently known. This way is also a way of dignity, not only for women, but for men as well. It has its foundations in a full-throated anthropology of the human person, combined with uncanny and persuasive readings of the signs of the times. In the balance of this reflection, I will highlight the elements of this way of life which opposes both consumerism and the objectification of women.

The first aspect of this way of dignity for women and men is the affirmation of the place of human beings in the world; they are above all other creation, and all man-made things in the world. As John Paul II is fond of repeating, man is the “only being which God has willed for his own sake”.¹¹ All else in the world is subject to the human person, who in turn is charged with responsible stewardship. Consumerism – which values things as much as or more than people – stands against this fundamental truth.

A second aspect is this: the human being striving toward self-realization will not find it by amassing riches for herself, but only through a “*sincere gift of self*,” through existing “for others”, as a “gift”.¹² The person who makes this freely willed gift is a “subject”, who decides for herself.¹³ Both males and females are to exist “mutually, ‘one for the other’”.¹⁴ This entire description of the meaning and the path of life stands in stark opposition to the way of objectification, which insists that you exist to gratify me – not mutually, not even voluntarily on your part, and often only at the most base physical level.

¹¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24; JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 18.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 18.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 7.

Third, this way affirms that there is meaning in God's having created the human race both male and female. One aspect of this is that women have a particular "genius" an "eternal originality", gifts for living that they demonstrate especially well or easily.¹⁵ Objectifying women obscures or completely hides this truth. It can make it impossible to see the gifts women hold in common with men – their equal creation in God's image and likeness, with reason and free will. It can further render impossible an appreciation for women's particular gifts for attention to and care for other persons, especially the most vulnerable. It is predictable, then, that if a woman is understood merely as an "object" to "own" (even if beautiful and desirable), this can lead to the crushing of her instincts to care for another person. When she fails to receive love, her own capacity to give love can be deformed, and replaced with selfishness, pride, vanity and greed.¹⁶

A fourth and final aspect of the "way" offered by modern Christianity, is its frank reading of the presence of original sin in the women's modern situation. John Paul II tells us in *Mulieris Dignitatem* that as a result of original sin, each sex can fail to see God's image in the other.¹⁷ The male/female relationship will be quite prone to disturbance, with the male seeking to "dominate" and the woman to abase herself to obtain union with the man.¹⁸ The woman might even react by "appropriating to [herself] male characteristics" in order to resist or even turn the table. Here is a reading of the human heart that resonates with the facts on the ground in North America, and is bound to strike men and women of today as all too true! In response to centuries of oppression, individual women and prominent movements opted to attempt to dominate men. Witness women perpetrating pornography themselves, sell-

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 11.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 29.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 9.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 10.

ing themselves to the highest-bidding photographer, moviemaker, magazine, advertiser or boyfriend. Witness women's increased willingness to hold men to standards and judgments nearly impossible to satisfy, leading to serial cohabitation, the high percentage of wife-initiated divorces, and deliberate decisions to bear children with no father in the picture, save as a source of child support. Original sin, as described by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, seems unmistakably present in such a collection of choices. Identifying its presence does not absolve bad choices, but gives us a much more precise idea of what we must struggle against.

CONCLUSION

North Americans seem particularly easily beguiled by the “myth of progress”, and by the idea that with the passage of history and the amassing of ideas about women's freedom, we must necessarily be better off than before. Thus is this part of the world resistant to disparaging ideas put forward in the name of “feminism”, particularly when the critique comes from the Catholic Church, which is often perceived to be “retrograde” regarding women.

In *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI disputes the notion that humans progress toward virtue merely by means of the passage of time or even technology. He reminds us that “freedom always remains also freedom for evil”.¹⁹ “In the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man's freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew”.²⁰ He further denies that “once the economy had been put right, everything would automatically be put right”.²¹ Progress, to be

¹⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 21.

progress, needs moral growth on the part of humanity”.²² Late 20th century feminists and others, however, often accepted the notion that material progress for women was the whole sum of progress.

The North American move to make consumerism synonymous with happiness and progress, including consumerism regarding women, is quite entrenched. At the same time, women and men are not blind to the ill effects of this approach. Many, including groups of women who identify themselves as “Christian feminists”, have spoken up both against rampant consumerism and the objectification of women. Sociologists, economists, and psychologists are more often reporting on the damage to women, men and families from these closely related phenomena. Many women who once aspired to “win the game” by becoming the ultimate consumer objects have lived to tell of the disappointments, frustrations or even brutalities that accompany such a choice. Increasingly, women with a wide field of opportunity, by virtue of excellent educations and favorable families, are speaking out in favor of simplifying their lives as against consumerism. They are also celebrating a life lived developing women’s obvious gift for “paying attention to the other person”.

Without ceasing to nurture and promote these favorable signs, however, a few doses of hard reality must be swallowed. First, nothing less than radical changes will be required to alter the situation for women’s dignity in the coming decades. In the recent words of the director of Australia’s Women’s Forum: “The decision not to submit to hyper-sexualized messages and to live above the dictates of the culture, needs to be seen for what it is – a radical and defiant alternative lifestyle”.²³ It must be perceived that the distance between current cultural and legal notions about women, and what our two most recent popes have offered, is as vast as it seems.

²² *Ibid.*, no. 23.

²³ *Dealing Girls a Raw and Racy Deal: Interview with Director of Women’s Forum*, March 21, 2007, published on the website: www.zenit.org.

Second, long term change will not come about via surface-level changes. A thorough understanding of the sources of women's dignity, the implications of a two-sexed humanity, the purpose of sexual relationships, and the value of people over things, among other topics, must be pursued. Otherwise, we will continue to exist in a society in which a woman feels that her "freedom" is promoted both via zealous legal protection from sexual harassment at work, alongside her protected right to sell her pornographic image online. We will not really be moving beyond the notion of freedom as the equivalent of "what Lola wants".

Third, the task of women's freedom is inherently social and with a large back debt to the poor. Yes, it is a personal and spiritual task. And it is most certainly a task for the family. But it is poor women in particular today who have suffered the worst effects of women's objectification and consequent loss of freedom. They are abused more often, bear children alone more often, never marry, divorce, cohabit, and seek abortions more often. The churches owe them more conversations about the dignity of women, and of male/female relationships. Leading women's voices – writers, academics, politicians, celebrities – owe honest public conversation about what really leads to happiness and freedom. It is not by means of becoming a consumer object. Other real options and models have to be provided and institutionalized in society.

Again, the size of this debt particularly to the poor in society, is enormous at this time in history. The Catholic Church has taken the intellectual lead, and via its churches and laity, needs to move even further into the practical sphere. Indeed, what is called for on the ground is nothing less than the "new feminism" that John Paul II called for in *Evangelium Vitae*,²⁴ as led by women themselves.

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 99.

Gender: an anthropological deconstruction and a challenge for faith

MARGUERITE A. PEETERS*

Gender is one of the most harmful categories in the feminist, sexual and cultural revolution that we are experiencing in the West. At the same time, it is one of the most effective mechanisms for the globalisation of that revolution. The objective of my talk is not to analyse the hyper-sophisticated arguments put forward by the social engineers who started this phenomenon,¹ but rather to attempt to extract a criterion of discernment for the Church as mother. I wish to do this first of all by highlighting the consequences for faith of the globalisation of gender as a process of subtle and manipulative cultural transformation.

A PROCESS OF DECONSTRUCTION

Gender is not an ideology in the proper sense of the term. The word “ideology” evokes systems of thought linked to Western modernity. In 1989 it was rightly said that they were finished as systems, that is, in their dimension as integrated, intellectually coherent, clearly identifiable and completely absorbing, that connected them with “masters” at the origins of the “great theories” that gave life to schools of thought. The

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¹ Cf. M.A. PEETERS, *La mondialisation de la révolution culturelle occidentale: concepts-clefs, mécanismes opérationnels*, Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics, 2007 (for information: iis@skynet.be).

ideologies deconstructed themselves one after another and the process of deconstruction that they have triggered has only left residue behind. In the West, after nineteen sixty-eight, the passage to post-modernity accelerated and caught us unawares, and we found ourselves catapulted from modern rationalism to postmodern irrationalism. As a process that is ambivalent, diffuse, imperceptible, insidious, that works within institutions and cultures, difficult to recognise and humanly incoherent, gender is a postmodern phenomenon.

Gender carries in its wake residue from feminism and Marxism, and it is based on a double dialectic opposition: that between man and woman (the man “who oppresses” the woman, the woman who wants “to be freed” from male power), and that between the concept of the sexes, female or male (the difference between them being inscribed in biology and therefore immutable), and gender, female or male (the difference between them being socially constructed, unstable and variable, not only according to cultures, but especially according to the choices made by individuals at various stages in their lives).

The separation of sex and gender, which they want to make definitive, breaks the ontological unity of the person and “divorces” it, so to speak, from itself. It claims that individuals must be able to “choose”, and should be able to shape themselves in a radically free way. This presumed freedom is arrived at through a process of liberation from that which is given, from reality, from nature, from traditions and from the distinctive female and male features inscribed by God in the anthropological composition of men and women. The postmodern celebration of absolute freedom of choice, that presumes that there are unlimited possibilities of choice given to individuals, allows them to gamble their lives without ever having to commit themselves in self-giving. Any obstacle of a cultural or religious nature in the exercise of this freedom, is regarded as discriminatory. Therefore, in the way of radicalism, gender goes beyond feminism. It “celebrates” culturally the diversity of choice of sexual behaviour, in the name of equality of power of all citizens.

Gender ideology claims that a woman's calling to be a mother² and spouse is a social construct that goes against equality. It is a stereotype to be deconstructed because it is judged to be negative, discriminatory and restrictive, and because it would make victims of women by hindering their self-determination. Women renounce their "reproductive role" as an injustice that prevents them from being equal to men in terms of social functions, and the predisposition of her body for maternity is an enemy to be fought.

When disassociated from sex, femininity and masculinity become interchangeable and end up without any content. We see how the new world culture is asexual or unisex, and having no well-defined gender, it is "neuter". This "asexualisation" deconstructs the configuration of the human person as a father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, brother or sister.

In the manner of all postmodern concepts, gender attacks the abuses of modernity. It attempts to react to the real disorders of machismo, authoritarianism, clericalism, paternalism and the power men hold over women that is a consequence of original sin, we are told in the Genesis story: "yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (*Gen 3: 16*). The response that the gender ideology gives to male domination is not love and reconciliation, but rather a revolt and search for power on the part of women who aspire to become equal to men in terms of social power. Pleasure, power and possession of "awareness" are temptations that are the big topics of gender ideology. There is nothing new under the sun.

² In this regard, it is significant that in the Consensus Document of the Beijing Conference, the term "gender" occurs two hundred and eighteen times, whereas the word "mother" appears seventeen times, and these were in contexts where it was associated with problematic situations, like those of single mothers, very young mothers and early pregnancies. Motherhood as a woman's fundamental calling is absent from the Beijing document.

BREAKING STEREOTYPES IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A NEW ETHIC, A VIRTUAL CIVILISATION

Gender ideology has given rise to a world culture that pushes for rights for lesbians, homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals, and now it has become discriminatory and against ethics to speak of man-woman complementarity. A new world ethic of “free choice” understood as such could even replace non-Western traditional cultures and the Judaeo-Christian ethic.

In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), the American Judith Butler, a university lecturer and defender of gender ideology, reproaches the feminist movement for having given bad service to the cause by declaring that women are a special group with common characteristics. This approach would reinforce the binary vision of man-woman relations, and would thereby limit the possibilities of choice of one’s own individual identity whereas the objective of the gender revolution is to multiply them *ad infinitum*. Butler wanted to break what she called the continuum between sex, gender and desire, with the intention of making gender (social identity or social role) and desire flexible and independent of the sex of the individual, without a fixed cause. She claimed that gender is not a stable attribute of a person. It is a fluid variable that changes according to context and stages of existence. Butler’s approach is that gender is a performance, that it is what we do at a given moment and not what we are. Identity would therefore be a sort of free electron that is not linked to essence, but only to performance.

We are living through a period of Western postmodern virtuality, in a civilisation that has lost its sense of reality. This virtuality is expressed with emphasis on access (and not on the object that is being accessed), possibility (and not on reality), choice (and not on what is being chosen), process (and not content), change (and not stable identity), aspirations (and not their concretisation), ability and potential (and not effort). An individual builds a sense of omnipotence, an imaginary

world with permanent access to every choice, a world in which it is possible to remain uninvolved personally. Motherhood and traditional family are being reduced to a myth – in any case outmoded –, and the dream to be realised is for women to be empowered according to the interpretation of the ideology.

Butler calls for subversive action, for the mobilisation of agents of change that can bring about the proliferation in culture of genders and identities, confusion and change in the norms concerning gender and the binary understanding of masculinity and femininity. *Gender Trouble* defines this revolutionary process of destabilisation. It claims that certain cultural configurations of gender (especially the Judaeo-Christian) have acquired a hegemonic power that seems “natural” in our culture. Butler wants us to behave in “a different way”. She wants the mass media, most of all, to play a special role in creating alternative images that can cause confusion in minds. We can, in any case, see this happening, especially in the West.

A BATTLE FOR MINDS

The battle we are fighting concerns the anthropological structure of man and woman as created by God, God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in other words, God’s plan of trinitarian love for men and women. It is a plan that concerns human beings, their divine origin and their essentially relational nature. Is the death of humanity not perhaps a consequence of the “death of God” proclaimed by Feuerbach and Nietzsche? We are all created to be fathers or mothers, sons or daughters, husbands or wives, brothers or sisters. If we deny the anthropological complementarity of men and women, trying to make all citizens radically “equal”, claiming that motherhood is a social injustice, reducing men and women to their social functions, to being “partners” joined by “contract”, then we create a culture that hinders the fulfilment of our universal human vocation.

The apparent harmlessness of “gender” contrasts with the significance of the anthropological, cultural and spiritual disaster it causes on the ground where it transforms mentalities and behaviour in favour of a new “ethic”, practically unobserved by most people.

Being difficult to identify, the gender ideology is concealed behind seductive concepts that are radically ambivalent. These concepts include advocacy for rights, women’s self-determination, equality of the sexes, quality of life, sustainable development and cultural diversity. After the fall of the Berlin Wall that happened on the powerful wave of globalisation, these concepts were gradually spread all over the world reaching even to the most remote African villages. The effects of the feminist revolution and Western culture were transformed into a global norm.

KICKOFF IN BEIJING

The gender issue became the object of a so-called “worldwide consensus” at the Beijing Conference in 1995. The effects of the feminist revolution and Western culture were transformed into a global norm. After Beijing, gender became part of politics at an international, regional, national and local level. There were juridical instruments (like the Maputo Protocol in Africa), school manuals, ethical codes for publishers, development NGOs, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which they hope to achieve by 2015. It has been placed as a priority across the board in international cooperation. It has now penetrated our societies from every side. We are in the midst of the application phase. The doctrinal efforts shown by agents of global change in the nineteen-nineties have lost momentum, but they have given way to operational fervour on all fronts. They put maximum pressure on the developing nations. They insist on the need to accelerate and multiply “concrete actions”, to measure results and the impact of policies for equality

of the sexes, to transform the Beijing objectives into “sustainable mechanisms”. In many countries, especially in Africa, Ministries for the Family are already being replaced by Ministries for Gender Policies. Although they seem to deal with the social advancement of women, in developing countries the door is now open for anthropological deconstruction operated by radical social engineers coming from abroad. In synthesis, they think that all citizens of the world should adopt the gender paradigm and conform to it, and be “formatted” in this way.

MEA CULPA ON THE PART OF CHRISTIANS

In view of the extent of this phenomenon, it is necessary, especially in the West, for Christians – politicians, educators, managements and pastors – to examine their own responsibility. They very often have not taken this cultural revolution seriously by trying to understand its key concepts, the operation mechanisms, and the consequences for faith. They have remained uninvolved, being content to criticise from a distance or as amateurs, and therefore they have been missing in the work of discernment. With their passivity, they have contributed to the widening of the gap between culture and faith, and to the spread of secularism that they lament so much today. Postmodern culture is the culture in which we live and move, the culture that educates us and that educates our children. In order to evangelise it, we must get to know it.

Instead of reflecting and taking action independently, in accordance with their identity, Christians, through ignorance due to their own omission, have often trailed along in this revolution. They have been reasoning according to corrupt schemata that are alien to them, and sometimes they have sunk to compromise. There is only a fine yet crucial line of demarcation separating a healthy and necessary advancement of the equal dignity of women and men and the social transformation being pushed by agents with their own private agendas. This line is

becoming hard to define. Because we have been giving way to the seduction of the new ethics, we sometimes become unfaithful to the magisterium of the Church.

The primary service that the Church should render to humanity is to remain itself. It cannot compromise with paradigms, programmes and “ values ” of an ethic that does not pertain to it.

THE WESTERN CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE LOSS OF FAITH

In a letter dated 30 November 2007 addressed to the delegation sent by Benedict XVI to Istanbul for the celebration of the feast of Saint Andrew, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I recalled the “ vocation of all Christians of the world to return to the fullness, youthfulness and purity of the Christian tradition of the early Church ”. He very appropriately highlighted the cause-effect link between the Western cultural tradition and apostasy. He wrote: “ The philosophy of the Enlightenment in the West and the French Revolution sparked a truly cultural revolution aimed at replacing the previous Christian tradition of the Western world with a new, non-Christian, concept of man and society. This revolution gave rise in many ways to the practical materialism of contemporary societies but also to diverse forms of militant atheism and totalitarianism ”. Christians have lost the sense of “ the concept of mystery in God and of His living worship, which is genuinely preserved in the East, as well as to the reduction of religious life to a humanistic ethic by means of the relativisation of doctrinal formulations ”.

The gender phenomenon comes at the end of a long revolutionary process that, in the West, has brought about a distorted conception of the equality of the sexes. After the French Revolution, a rebel spirit that motivated Western individualism has contaminated the concepts of the rights of human beings, citizenship, legally constituted state, secularism,

freedom, equality, brotherhood (understood as purely horizontal, eliminating the Father of all), social contract, sovereignty, modernity and, finally, of “universal values”. Had Jean-Jacques Rousseau not already let it be understood that to be a father is a social privilege that goes against equality? The progressive radicalisation of the concept of equality has passed from Freud who proclaimed the death of the father, from Nietzsche who spoke of the death of God,³ from Karl Marx, from the painful experience of communism in Eastern Europe and from nineteen sixty-eight. Post-modernity has progressively gained ground. The concept of gender has the revolutionary objective of restructuring society according to a new model of gender equality. It began to emerge in the nineteen-seventies, and in the nineteen-nineties there was rapid globalisation of the postmodern ethic. The new world culture tends to exclude from its language – in order to deny reality –, the words mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, spouse, complementarity, disinterested giving, love, communion, covenant, life, sacrifice, and many other concepts of universal and Judaeo-Christian humanity.

In other words, the Western cultural revolution is becoming the diktat of a new post-Christian ethic that is tending to be transformed into:

- citizens/individuals who are “formatted” according to a secular model that is now in decline, where the priority will not be the fact of being members of a family;
- possessors of individual rights where they will not be recognised as children of the same father;
- partners in a contract between the sexes, and not spouses linked by a covenant, nor equal brothers and sisters;
- self-styled “responsible” reproducers of sustainable development of the planet and not parents;

³ The expression “the death of God” first appeared in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche in 1882 (*The Gay Science*) and then in 1887 in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

- agents of change, zombies of world governance and not free responsible people;
- “autonomous” individuals that pursue their own “interests”, their own “well-being”, their own “quality of life”, and not people created through love and for disinterested love.

The West does not seem to have been able to produce a model of citizenship and a model of social order that recognises the stability and primacy of love, family, motherhood, fatherhood, filial brotherhood/sisterhood, and that are open to the sense of the sacred and to the plan of the Creator. Once the separation of Church and State was achieved, between the citizens and the reality of our relational anthropological structure that predestines us for love, then modernity fell to pieces and made way for post-modernity and the state of dissolution in which we find ourselves today.

AFRICA'S HOUR

Our African brothers and sisters are aware that Western civilisation is dying. In the present world situation, the vocation of Church-Family of God that is flourishing in Africa,⁴ takes on a prophetic dimension. It will be very difficult for the advocates of the feminist revolution – but unfortunately not impossible – to uproot from the African soul the sense of fatherhood (human and divine), the spirit of sons and daughters which is a grace, the sense of universal filial brotherhood/sisterhood (and not purely horizontal as in the “fraternity” generated by the French Revolution), the sense of motherhood and life, the sense of the vocation of men and women, their indissoluble union and their comple-

⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*.

mentarity in love, in the image of the Trinity – in other words, the sense of love, of its gratuity, the intuition of the One and Triune God which is love. The gifts of God to Africa are for all of humanity. It is therefore desirable that we in the West should open up more to this and give our African brothers and sisters a voice.

THE RE-EVANGELISATION OF OUR PEOPLE

Is the process of anthropological deconstruction, of which the gender ideology is a particularly visible phenomenon, perhaps taking humanity and the peoples that the West evangelised long ago to the brink of apostasy? The question is primarily a pastoral one. The Church is not actually an assembly of experts and specialists, but of pastors and flocks, of God's children. It is a family. The re-evangelisation of our people is a common task for all Christians, and what it needs is not intellectual or academic collaboration, but acts of charity, of love, of communion of life: "We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1: 3).

The rejection of motherhood and family

ELENA LUGO*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary women insist that they want to be mothers, but to be so in freedom; to have children, but to do so with dignity; to build a future, but to do so with love; to have a companion, but on an equal footing; to be wives and take care of the home, and at the same time to have professional employment, and always to be regarded as a person.

This insistence can be read in several ways. I shall examine just two of these which I feel are the main ones and that, moreover, are in conflict with each other. On first reading, we might interpret it to be an expression of protest with a hint of postmodernism, centred on the individualistic autonomy typical of “gender feminism”. Moreover, the same statement could be used to refute, partially or totally, if not actually motherhood itself, the fact that pregnancy is a natural and objective phase of maternity. Likewise, it could lead to an interpretation of family that is a far cry from inter-subjective and conjugal communion that is open to life, and it could also give rise to disparagement of the unselfish magnanimity of women as mothers. The initial statement of my talk could perhaps imply that a mechanistic fragmentation is taking place of the organic and natural totality of the meaning of motherhood and family. It also insinuates that motherhood is to be extolled only if strictly and individually planned, to the possible detriment of the elements of marriage – intimacy and fertility – and their centrality in family life. The

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concept of the experience of pregnancy as being inherent to motherhood could be interpreted in this first reading as being a discriminatory punishment, a deplorable misfortune, a technically substitutable option, sympathetic to ectogenesis, and, furthermore, to be a consumable item.

In all the variants of motherhood identified here, the natural and objective order of motherhood and family is being cast aside, and we must definitely try to restore it to its proper place. It is for this purpose that I suggest a second reading of the introductory statement. It will allow us to place that declaration of what women want in the context of a personalistic and ontological anthropology, and according to the ethic that corresponds to it.

With personalistic ethics, or rather, the bioethical current that derives from them, we shall demonstrate the organic union between person, love and life in order to explain and justify the authentic value of freedom, dignity, love and equality between man and woman. Personalistic anthropology and the related integral bioethics reveal the wisdom of nature in preserving genetic, gestational and psychosocial motherhood with its continuity and internal coherence. It is an organic perspective that incorporates and clearly defines the totality of events, as Father Josef Kentenich would say, in the light of natural explanation and supernatural justification.

My presentation will take the following order: I shall speak of the postmodern cultural context that supports a rejection of motherhood and of family according to its natural and objective meaning. I shall then go on to illustrate the tendency to dismiss pregnancy as a phase of motherhood and the related repercussions on the integrity of the family. I shall offer an anthropological and ethical interpretation that corresponds to the natural order, and I shall underline the integration of motherhood and family by illustrating an organic vision of pregnancy/motherhood according to its natural significance. I shall conclude with some recommendations regarding the family as a place of interpersonal encounter and safeguarding of life.

I. PRESENTATION OF THE POSTMODERN CULTURAL CONTEXT THAT SUPPORTS A REJECTION OF MOTHERHOOD AND FAMILY IN THE NATURAL AND OBJECTIVE SENSE

Let us begin with the concept of family. The crisis affecting the family also puts in doubt its constitutive elements in general, and motherhood in particular.

From a purely historical point of view, we know that the family as an institution has already undergone one serious crisis. That was when the traditional family began to cease meaning the extended family and to become the present nuclear family. This crisis reduced the functions of the family institution. It consisted essentially in the reduction in the number of members and the size of the family, and in a curtailment of the central role that it played in pre-modern culture in the spheres of work, education and society. Now there is a threat of a new crisis in which the modern family is passing from a nuclear family to another arrangement that is ambiguously defined as postmodern. This is removing the concept of family from society. The perception of family as a socially necessary institution is reduced, and different forms of human coexistence are arising that are based on the criterion of the individual prevailing over those of community. This is bringing about a devaluation of the family from its objective and essential role as the natural foundation of society. The family itself is exposed to subjectivism and cultural relativism, and this alters the meaning of sexuality, conjugal love and receptivity to life. There is a sense of crisis in the very identity of the family as institution as it is understood today, and this in turn is caused by a further crisis concerning the objectivity of truth and goodness formulated in natural moral law.

If it is a particular model of family that is in crisis, then we need to analyse the structure and the characteristics of such a model in the light of a fundamental criterion so that we can verify if it can be effectively justified today. If the model of family in crisis is the one called patriar-

chal family or nuclear family, seen as an antiquated or stereotyped version of its original plan in modernity, then it would be necessary to explore the natural foundation of the family in order to find the essence that animates it and that would justify another model, without however excluding the family itself as an institution. In this way, then, the present crisis would not be a catastrophe with the loss of abiding values that must be categorically preserved, and it would not imply that the family as institution is destined to disappear because of its own structural deficiency.

What we have to do is decidedly more radical and more difficult than you would think at first glance. We have established that it is absolutely necessary to return to the essential natural source of the family in order to examine it critically and take a personal position in its regard. Nevertheless, our task is particularly challenging because this source is not free of ambiguity in the postmodern age. Postmodernity tends to reject the philosophical meaning of nature, to place in doubt the objectivity of truth and the goodness inherent in the natural order. It also questions the possibility that we can derive from the natural order a normative interpretation of categories that we use when we think of person, love, sexual cohabitation, motherhood/fatherhood, in short, the essential aspects of family.

According to this evaluation, the real crisis lies in the concepts or theoretical notions and in the practical living out of love, sexuality, freedom, and unconditional self-giving of one to the other. Consequently, it is a crisis in the concept of motherhood and family. It is bringing about a reformulation of the very concept of person, where the essence of the person is limited to his/her empirically measurable functions, and his/her intrinsic dignity is reduced to a positivist vision of rights and duties.

These concepts today conceal much ambiguity in the area of the private culture of objectivity with regard to truth and goodness. They are seen through an ethical relativism that leads to ways of life, love,

motherhood and family that are subject to egocentric criteria. The family and its essential components are relativised according to a subjectivistic and utilitarian criterion. Freedom loses its meaning as being relational, ministerial and directed towards responding to the needs of others. Personalised sexuality is reduced to utility, egoism and immediate satisfaction without ever really leading to substantial happiness.

At the same time, relativism and cultural utilitarianism have brought about new vocabulary to describe concepts related to family. Examples are: reproductive health, which clearly means prevention of reproduction; divorce and abortion policies, which are supposed to be strategies aimed at eliminating divorce and abortion; plural families, with a vast range of possibilities, even one-person families, and these are to substitute the family as we understand it in its natural and permanent meaning (the common meaning); gender, which is intended to substitute the word and reality of sex, is a term utilised in numerous ways, all included under the so-called “gender perspective”.

If we ask ourselves about the possible cause of this radical crisis in concepts and life experiences that nourish and sustain love, marriage, motherhood and, consequently, the family, the answer we shall find is already well known but not widely accepted in its implications. The origin of the crisis stems from the very roots of our turning away from God. This causes people to close in on themselves and to lose sensitivity towards others. Little by little, sooner or later, they reach the point of regarding others as aliens, and even considering them as less than human. We see that the fundamental issue in this crisis stems from the eclipsing of the personal and living God. This in turn obscures the presence of mystery in people and in their interactions with others. Father Kentenich would say that turning away from God dehumanises people and reduces them to levels below that of animals, for they, at least, faithfully follow their instincts.

Little by little, we see the emergence of practical materialism. Being is substituted by having, and the essence of life is reinterpreted according to

a kind of functionalism in terms of the quality, beauty, pleasure and external success of a person. The deepest spiritual and religious dimensions become mere subjective and personal idiosyncrasies, having no impact on the life of the community, on the social perception of family and even less on the family being legally recognised as a basic institution.

This is how the way is open for “light” families which are nourished and sustained by selfishness and permissiveness. The result of their feverish search for pleasure and elegance without limits or scruples is a highly permissive form of hedonism. This means that there are no prohibitions or forbidden territories, and no limits to entertainment. There are no impositions except for some minimal laws necessary for civil coexistence. This all leads to scepticism and relativism. Because of this sceptical attitude, opinions suddenly change and distance themselves from transcendent values. They then fall into indifference and vulnerability. This is relativism, an invitation not to commit yourself to anything but to follow subjective pleasures. In this way a “light” person becomes nihilistic. They find themselves without points of reference and at the same time they are ruled by a false sense of freedom where truth is their own opinion, and the most convenient choice is regarded as being righteous.

They have no critical observations or cultural concerns, nor any great hopes for society. These “light” people play and live without any noble or humanistic objectives. They have no higher aspirations, but vacuously oppose all styles of life that are different from their own. Their mediocrity generates a new kind of illiteracy. Even though they may be capable of grasping varied complex networks of information, they still lack education. They accumulate different life experiences, but they lack practical and direct knowledge. They recognise values only to the extent to which they define their way of being and perceiving. They are incapable of having a genuine encounter and of being receptive to anything that is really different. The result is that they remain spectators, passive people who are content to take part in a project that they

have not created. This is all hidden behind incessant activity, and behind passion for nothing. Allowing oneself everything guarantees nothing. They experience events with indifference, and they are manipulated by stimuli that do not satisfy and do not make them happy. Their inner selves cannot be reached, being a place of tedium, boredom, desolation, and boundless tolerance and curiosity.

To sum up, the crisis of the family in its present form, nuclear and patriarchal, as some sociologists describe it, is under threat at its very roots. It is a crisis of reason, concepts and values. Individuals are disjointed and are losing their fullness and truth. Their faces are overshadowed and their gaze is short-sighted. The main casualties of this short-sightedness today are matrimonial love, motherhood/fatherhood, the family and life. Without falling into dogmatism or fatalism, as both attitudes demonstrate signs of desperation, we must try to vitalise the natural meaning of the essential dimensions of the family, in particular those of motherhood. We must do so with inner objectivity, and from the level on which we share the human condition in its universality.

Doubts and threats affecting the constitutive elements of the family

1. *The reinterpretation of human sexuality*

I shall now point out what we regard as objectionable, or at least problematic, with regard to sexuality, from a personalistic and organic point of view:

- the fact that sexuality is being reduced to a mere genital and biological fact;
- the fact that human sexuality should have its exclusive archetype in the male, while considering the female to be a simple appendix, or to be an impoverished form in comparison with the male and to be dependent on him;

- the fact that sexuality should be something alien to the totality of a human being and that it is, at most, circumscribed within the narrow sphere of biology;
- the fact that sexuality is being described according to two totally opposing human types that are symmetrically diverse and have no identity or reciprocal relations;
- the fact that sexuality, described as an individual's central need, is that which arouses most interest and happiness and demands satisfaction in order to achieve well-being, joy and energy;
- the fact that discipline and self-control are said to be repression of this need and to cause frustration of sexual satisfaction, and that this could be dangerous and harmful because it is alien to human beings, against nature and fomented by authoritarian ideologies and interests;
- the fact that the satisfaction of sexual impulse is said to be an individual right, even of adolescents, and that it should be satisfied through masturbation, and heterosexual and even homosexual relations, as soon as a person feels ready and able to do so.¹

In short, postmodernity challenges us with the proposition that sexuality does not have any need for axiological justification, nor for integration with a person's circumstances like marriage, love, procreation, intimacy and unconditional interpersonal belonging. A mechanical separation can be seen arising between matrimonial love/sexuality and maternal receptiveness to life.

2. *The substitution of natural sexual identity with the gender perspective*

The dimension of greatest impact on the theme of identity and sexual differentiation is now the so-called "gender ideology". As this topic

¹ Cf. J.R. FLECHA ANDRÉS, *Moral de la persona*, Madrid 2002, chap. II.

was masterfully explained in the previous lecture, I shall only make some brief comments on its implications that are related to my topic.

The gender perspective encompasses various actions which include the following:

- the dissemination of methods of contraception through reproductive health policies;
- campaigns to guarantee women access to “safe” legal abortion without restrictions;
- the legalisation of sterilisation as a contraceptive method;
- activities that spread the gender perspective, including mass media campaigns;
- activities directed towards groups considered to be at risk, including minors, without guaranteeing the involvement of the family;
- the introduction of “gender quotas” that measure the participation of women and men at the various levels of social and political organisation;
- the legalisation of unions between two people of the same sex with the aim of making these unions equal to marriage with the possibility of adopting;
- in the educational sphere, strategies of changing textbooks in order to eliminate all stereotyped perceptions of men and women;
- transversality: there is an effort underway to integrate gender issues in all social programmes, so that this perspective will be the criterion of analysis and projection of public policies.

In short, gender ideology underlies a series of actions that work against motherhood, life and family. In the framework of public policies, they use the gender perspective in order to distribute contraceptives and abortion pills, and to decriminalise and legalise abortion and

sterilisation. These are actions contrary to life and the family that also involve violations of fundamental human rights, as in the case of the right to life.

This ideology, in turn, introduces conflict into society. Instead of seeing women within the wide framework of the family and society, it emphasises the differences and compares women's rights with those of men's, in an attitude of distrust and defensiveness.²

3. *The fragmentation of the bonds of matrimonial love as the heart of the family*

These postmodern times are seeing forms of family coexistence emerging that we consider to be real challenges because they weaken the very roots of marriage as the basis of the family. They also eliminate the essential element of motherhood from the conjugal nucleus. We shall call them by their respective contemporary sociological designation.

The so-called "alternative families": one-parent families; those with a father who has children from previous marriages; extended families in which the relatives assume the obligations pertaining to parents. Political and economic interests, sustained by mass media communications, have made use of their influence in order to statistically normalise these families, in an attempt to discredit the nuclear family of Christian tradition by considering it to be unattainable in modern times.

Unmarried couples: this includes a series of many different kinds of arrangement. They share the common denominator of being couples who are not married who live together with a sexual relationship. These unions are options that reflect the individualistic and subjectivistic mentality of our times.

² Cf. M.L. DI PIETRO, *Sexualidad y Procreación Humana*, Buenos Aires 2005, chap. II.

Premarital cohabitation: of limited duration, but it trivialises the commitment to marriage fidelity which includes exclusiveness. It goes on to bring instability to the relationship, pain and deep suffering on the part of the person who is abandoned, as well as the demoralisation of the children if there are any, given that motherhood is regularly excluded by means of contraceptives.

Extra-marital affairs open wide the doors to very serious dangers: the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus, pregnancy among adolescents and hence the risk of becoming teenage mothers, not to speak of venereal diseases. Fortunately, recent studies (2006) have shown that the values of fidelity and sexual abstinence until marriage are still feasible today and that moreover they are the least aggressive and most effective solutions in preventing the HIV/AIDS virus and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Divorced couples, some of whom remarry: the various motives for divorce – incompatibility of the couple, a lack of seriousness in making the decision to form permanent bonds, emotional immaturity, an insatiable thirst for pleasure and emphasis placed on self-fulfilment to the detriment of the will for altruistic and magnanimous service – lead to the breakdown of the initial intentions of marriage.

Married life in our postmodern times can also be complicated by factors like the longer life expectancy of couples today. Couples need to keep their conjugal harmony for a longer time as they deal with the inevitable process of ageing and the corresponding bio-psychosocial changes that it brings.

We must also realise that a couple spend increasingly less time together and are absent from the life of the household, mostly because they both work outside. This limits the opportunities for dialogue between the couple and for attention to be given to the children.

Conjugal life becomes mechanical and has many obligations and few gratifications. They look for satisfaction outside with other people, and this is the cause of emotional separation between the two and of

potentially dangerous friendships that can become real threats to marriage fidelity. When the couple do not share and nourish their conjugal love, problems of communication become more frequent, as does the weakening of parental authority, intrusion by a third party, violence between the couple and sexual disharmony.

Finally, but of fundamental importance for our central topic of motherhood, the contraception mentality with the tendency to abortion on the one hand, and the technologisation of procreation on the other, are all factors that are challenges for pregnancy/motherhood, as I shall point out in the next section.

II. REJECTION OF PREGNANCY AS A PHASE OF MOTHERHOOD AND THE RELATED NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS ON THE INTEGRITY OF THE FAMILY

1. *Pregnancy and motherhood seen as a punishment*

A punishment is essentially a response or a secondary effect and consequence of actions or wrongdoings that are to be condemned. The nature and extent of the offence should be matched in quality and quantity (type and intensity) by a just punishment. An unjust punishment could be seen as a conceptual contradiction. An unjust punishment could be something bad and therefore unjustifiable. On the other hand, if it is just, it can be instrumental in bringing about good conduct and re-establishing the objective order of the common good that was ruptured because of that wrongdoing.

Can pregnancy, an integral aspect of motherhood, be considered to be a punishment and to be unjust? A similar interpretation could be suggested for unwanted pregnancies. They are unforeseen pregnancies because of an involuntary lack of information and sexual education, a lack of preparation for marriage and responsible fatherhood. A woman can be the victim of her husband's selfishness, or of a person with

whom she has no affective links but who rapes her, seduces her, takes advantage of her, frightens her, and causes her to see the consequent pregnancy as a punishment brought about by the exploiter who lives in a hedonistic way, who cannot control his sexual impulses, and who seeks out pleasure without any moral responsibility. The woman, even if she rejects the pregnancy and regards it to be a punishment, could make this an experience of motherhood by deciding to take the correct course of action. Although she may feel that this pregnancy is a punishment, the badly treated woman could, with due help, recognise that the baby she is carrying within her cannot be considered to be a punishment because that would be to contradict the intrinsic dignity of the child's being.

2. Pregnancy and motherhood as an accident

The interpretation of pregnancy/motherhood as an accident is associated with the contraceptive mentality. Contraception is not simply an action that in some way prevents conception of a human life, but it is a decision that prevents freely chosen sexual acts from bringing about the generation of a new life. It is a constituent of that couple's sexual behaviour, an act that, given the need or the will to avoid conception, allows them to proceed with the intention of consuming sexual relations, by accepting an aspect of its essence (union) and refusing the other (procreation). Both in the case where they think that reception to life is a threat to conjugal intimacy, and in the case in which they feel that maternity would not be opportune at that time, the couple tend to sacrifice the natural integrity of the conjugal act. They are distorting the authentic expression of the message of the body sexualised in its integral truth, which in matrimonial love means union of the senses and of affection.

According to what I shall now draw your attention to from a critical point of view, the use of contraceptives runs the risk of violating the

personalistic norm that indicates through love, and through use, the appropriate response to being a person. The other must not be reduced to an object or to “something”, because this is a person, a “who”.³

3. *Pregnancy/maternity as an adversity to be overcome*

The contraceptive mentality contributes to the acceptance of abortion. Although the UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights* does not include among its rights the sexual and reproductive health of women or the voluntary suspension or interruption of pregnancy, the topic continues to be rooted in contemporary ideology. In any case, the topic appears in article 14 of the *Protocol Declaration*.⁴

They do not usually speak of abortion but of “interruption of pregnancy”. This expression suggests the idea that although desired pregnancy is something marvellous, unwanted pregnancy is an illness and its cure is abortion. This is real semantic engineering, disseminated by the communications media which, from the point of view of rights, health, etc., is inclined to favour abortion.

Both abortion and the contraceptive mentality lead to a perspective that is utilitarianistic and technical-scientific. They try to demarcate the structure and dynamics of life according to functional models that can be statistically determined. Although the human embryo is seen to be a human life and belonging to the human species, it is also denied the status of person and the dignity that corresponds to that status. Therefore, they consider that the integrity of the human embryo can be sacrificed. Even the selective removal of a malformed twin is seen as a eugenic

³ Cf. P. DE LAUDURANTAYA, “Contraception and the Person”, in: *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (from here on to be cited as NCBQ), vol. 3, no. 1, 35-37.

⁴ Cf. J. HAAS, “Person and Human Being in the UNESCO-Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights”, NCBQ, vol. 7, no. 1 (2007), 47; see also P. DE LAUDURANTAYA, “Contraception and the Person”, *op. cit.*

intervention, as is the extraction of stem cells beginning from the blastomere stage, with the aim of offering hypothetical therapeutic benefits to people affected by Parkinson's or Alzheimer's disease. It can be manipulated through in-vitro fertilisation and it can be cloned, insofar as it is technically possible and relatively secure. The abortion mentality is locked in a mechanistic mind-set, and so it assumes a technical-scientific perspective regarding the beginning of human life, meaning that it interprets it as something fragmented or reduced to its biological-genetic units. Furthermore, it adheres to the substitution of natural procreation by forms of artificial reproduction, which we shall refer to again later on.

We maintain that, if abortion were the only alternative to preserving the mother's life, in the absence of other resources for her survival, a woman could present arguments for the extraction of the fetus in cases where the pregnancy is particularly complicated or the fetus is likely to die or suffer from an anomaly incompatible with life. Further on I shall say more about abortion as removing an essential resource that cannot be substituted. It means violating a unique union of intimate dependence constituted by the mother and child.⁵

4. The technicalisation of pregnancy/maternity and methods of artificial reproduction that substitute procreation

A 'technical' activity is a productive activity, and as this is or should be controlled by practical human reasoning, it takes the name of technology (technical + logos). Technical reasoning is a means of pursuing an aim, and therefore it is ruled by considerations of utility and efficiency in its effort to manipulate and control the object of the application in order to maximise productivity. This tells us that technical reasoning is not as impartial as we may think. It persuades us to see reality

⁵ Cf. P. DE LAUDURANTAYA, "Contraception and the Person", *op. cit.*

as something neutral that is to be controlled, and knowledge as a resource of power and action. At the same time it tends to assess everything according to one pragmatic criterion, which is that things have value according to their function and utility for human beings individually or collectively.

Technical reasoning tends to encroach on the natural order so as to reshape it or synthesise it. These interventions can include substitution or exchange, and may not be confined to assistance in helping nature to achieve its purposes. When it is about human nature or personhood as spirit-incarnate-sexual, it is necessary to seriously heed the principle that says that when technology tells us that something can be done, it does not mean that it should be done. This principle becomes a priority when it concerns the procreative functions understood as an experience of love in union and receptiveness to life.⁶

a) Pregnancy via in-vitro fertilisation (IVF)

With in-vitro fertilisation conception is achieved in a laboratory and the woman becomes pregnant when the embryo is transferred to her womb. Pregnancy in its natural sense is thus divided into two phases: the technologically mediated fertilisation followed by implantation. In this way, fertilisation and pregnancy – integral parts of motherhood – are separated, as they do not follow their natural continuity but are presented as two events placed under the control and dominion of the individual with the assistance of a technician.

In the context of IVF, which separates pregnancy and conception, the full meaning of motherhood becomes ambiguous. Life, that seen from a natural and ontologically objective point of view begins at conception, is not taken into consideration. More importance is given to

⁶ Cf. E. LUGO, “Filosofía de la Tecnología”, in: *Ética Profesional en la Ingeniería*, Mayagüez Puerto Rico 1987.

the implantation. We must recognise that, notwithstanding the fact that regenerative medicine is still at the experimental stage, it is researchers, interested for therapeutic reasons in extracting stem cells from pre-implanted embryos, that promote the recognition of pregnancy as being the phase of implantation in the uterus, and they identify the conceived child as a pre-embryo lacking personhood.

Beyond any doubt, the woman who receives the implant becomes a mother from that moment in which she chooses voluntarily to be united intimately and uniquely with a new life. However, as I shall demonstrate in the next section which will focus on criticisms that I regard as pertinent, IVF overlooks the natural bond that ontologically modifies the woman, a bond that touches all the dimensions of her being, spiritually, affectively, cognitively and physiologically. They begin with nuptial intimacy and extend from conception until childbirth, and then throughout her life as mother to her child.

This continuity is even less evident in the experience of surrogate motherhood as it is separate from the nuptial bond, and in pregnancy through heterological insemination where the woman receives a fertilised embryo that is alien to her genetic constitution.⁷

b) Surrogate motherhood

The concept of “surrogate mother” can have various meanings. These are:

1) It is remunerated maternity, which consists in a contract in which it is specified that the woman is lending her services to carry the pregnancy in exchange for money which she will receive from the couple concerned when they receive the baby at the moment of birth.

⁷ Cf. W. MAY, “Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life”, in: *Our Sunday Visitor*, Huntington Indiana 2000, 811; M.L. DI PIETRO, *Sexualidad y Procreación Humana*, op. cit., chap. VIII.

2) It is a contract in the strict sense, an agreement made before gestation, which stipulates that the baby will be handed over to the couple who made the agreement.

3) Deriving from the last point, adoption is excluded. In this case, the pregnant mother renounces from the beginning the possibility of adopting and bringing up the baby she is carrying in her womb.

4) A genetic bond is excluded. In this case, the pregnant mother is not carrying genetic material but is simply carrying an implanted embryo in her womb, conceived independently of her genetic contribution. This leads to the next possibility.⁸

c) Heterologous transfer

With this technology, the implantation of an embryo in a woman's womb gives her the opportunity to be a mother and to establish an intimate bond with the baby who is about to be born, not only outside a marriage union but even unconnected from the genetic point of view. In this case, there is an implantation of a leftover embryo from IVF, perhaps having been unfrozen, with the intention of facilitating its birth or survival. This kind of implantation is difficult to classify, whether to consider it as a prenatal adoption or as a saving of life.⁹

d) Artificial uterus (ectogenesis)

By total ectogenesis we understand the conception and development of a human being outside the mother's uterus from the beginning of its existence until the equivalent of the fortieth week of gestation. Partial ectogenesis is the development of a phase of gestation outside the maternal womb.

⁸ Cf. J. BERKMAN, "Gestating the Embryo of Others", *NCBQ*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2003), 317.

⁹ Cf. N. TONTI-FILIPPINI, "The Embryo Rescue Debate", *NCBQ*, vol. 3, no. 1, 119-20; see also S. KELLMEYER, "Embryo Adoption", *NCBQ*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2007), 267.

This means that an artificial uterus is needed for total or partial gestation in order to generate and sustain the growth of a embryo or fetus until its full development or part thereof. It is therefore predicted that one day it will be possible to generate an embryo in-vitro and implant it in an artificial uterus.

If the removal of the embryo or fetus from the mother's uterus is a preventive or therapeutic measure, with clear advantages for the life or health of the baby or the mother, then this transfer to an artificial uterus would be less problematic.¹⁰

e) The technologisation of childbirth

Obstetrics in the United States is predominantly directed towards the use of technology in controlling childbirth. This is based on the conviction that technology is superior to nature and that machines are more trustworthy than human skills. This shows a philosophy of medicine that favours and prefers technology to nature. Natural regular childbirth, achieved through a normal physiological process, is made subordinate to surgical interventions and reduced to a pathology in need of cure. This means that the technological-scientific model of obstetrics does not consider childbirth to be a personal experience of profound and long-lasting dimensions for the couple and for the family in general, especially for the mother.¹¹

5. *To summarise*

Contraceptives, abortion, in-vitro fertilisation and the reproductive methods this allows, do not improve health or cure the mother's body.

¹⁰ Cf. C. KACZOR, "Could Artificial Wombs End the Abortion Debate?", NCBQ, vol. 5, no. 2 (2005), 289.

¹¹ Cf. S. SMITH-BARTEL, "Welcoming the Child at Birth", NCBQ, vol. 6, no. 2 (2006), 205; see also S. KELLMEYER, "Embryo Adoption", NCBQ, vol. 7, no. 2 (2007), 267.

In fact, they prevent, interrupt or replace, with prearranged patterns, the natural process of fertility and gestation. This is in order to satisfy individualistic desires that are alien to motherhood, which is tied to an exclusive nuptial bond. These interventions place the autonomy of the person seriously at risk, as well as her freedom to choose the best or what is inherent to life, and interpersonal relations according to the purpose of being a person. In order to better uphold the positive aspect of the introductory sentence to this presentation, we must give it a second reading inspired by personalistic anthropology and bioethics, established in the objective and intelligible natural order.

III. A BRIEF ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL INTERPRETATION

I shall now give a brief anthropological and ethical interpretation of all that we have said so far that corresponds to the natural order and that gives an organic vision of motherhood and the family. Let us keep in mind the introductory sentence of this presentation: Contemporary women insist that they want to be mothers, but to be so in freedom; to have children, but to do so with dignity; to build a future, but to do so with love; to have a companion, but on an equal footing; to be wives and take care of the home, and at the same time to have professional employment, and always to be regarded as a person.

Therefore, I shall try to respond to the queries that arise concerning the types of pregnancy that represent a challenge for motherhood and the family.

1. *Person in the ontological sense*

Supported by a personalistic anthropology, an organic vision of motherhood and family is regulated by respect for the dignity, integrity and transcendence of the human being. In this same context, corporeity

is the visible mode of the spiritual or transcendental domain of the person as it is the source of unity and meaning of all that relates to the mind, body and spirit. This clearly goes beyond the dualism of soul/body, and the reduction of the spiritual to the material and material to the spiritual. In virtue of the ontological definition of person, the priority given to the yearning to live “always as a person” has a universal and objectively valid justification.

2. Matrimonial love and equality

According to organic personalism, sexual corporeity is a nuptial and sacramental gift, from person to person, that manifests the most intimate bond between love and life.

Both female and male sexuality are presented as ways of being a person in the reciprocity and condition of interpersonal communion. It is a sexuality centred on a person being receptive to the spouse, and never an experience of possessive individual gratification with respect to the other. The conjugal act is reciprocal self-giving, total and exclusively of singular intimacy, where each one is the subject and the object of desire and is generously receptive to new life. The intensity of physical drive and mental energy are integrated in caring love for the person of the beloved. They are not spotlighted or idolised, because otherwise, sooner or later, they can be debased and trivialised in conjugal life. In other words, the preliminary condition for the integration of sexuality in one's personality is the caring concern for the integral good of the other person. To love is to be able to say “you” and consequently “yes” to the being of the beloved. An organic perspective shows that the sexual impulse has its origin and transcendental purpose in the spiritual realm of love. It is communion within the totality of the being of a person like relationship, dialogue and complementarity of the you and the me in communion. It is an “us”. It should not be reduced to mere attraction conditioned by physical and psychological attributes, as

claimed by the Freudian interpretation. In this way, sexuality that is not oblatinal but that is possessive and selfish betrays its own expressiveness of personal love and ceases to be human. It becomes harmful and disfigures the one who claims to love the beloved, because it distorts the bond that should constitute the “us”. In this same context, chastity, far from being an impediment to freedom in love, is seen as a condition for love inspired in concern for the well-being of the beloved. It guarantees that tenderness has priority over the satisfaction of selfish desire for domination and possession. For the man, chastity represents a success of his virility, and for a woman it means to feel affirmed as a person. In every case it means equality in terms of dignity and complementary difference in reciprocal responsibility in loving and fruitful self-giving.

3. *Dignity and freedom in responsible and generous motherhood. Answers to the challenges of pregnancy-motherhood-family*

a) Concerning the contraceptive mentality

I propose to unmask the contraceptive mentality and technological-scientific mentality of postmodernity that have undermined the meaning and ontological continuity of nuptial love, and that is pregnancy-motherhood-family.

In his cycle of catecheses on human love, John Paul II declared: the conjugal act signifies not only love, but also potential fecundity. Therefore it cannot be deprived of its full and adequate significance by artificial means. [...] The one is activated together with the other and in a certain sense the one by means of the other”.¹²

With this he emphasised the danger of a person’s will being an instrument of instrumental reasoning when it does not recognise truth

¹² JOHN PAUL II, General Audience, 22 August 1984, in: *The Theology of the Body*, Boston 1997, 398.

or objective good as norms for governing the body, which it interprets as a mere biological process. It is the expression of a mind/nature dualism, in which an arrogant will exercises its own creative and prioritised freedom on a sexual corporeity which it controls and manipulates.

The idea is being put forward that fertility or the ability to procreate are biological events that are sub-personal and have no particular significance, and that they belong and are receptive to a voluntary decision that bestows them with instrumental goodness. In that case, it would be a good for the person and not a good of the person, inherent in a person's ontological totality. It is a procreative aspect of sexuality, and it is interpreted as a good for a person in the sense and measure in which it gives value and purpose, as procreation in itself is only a biological possibility that human beings share with animals. Only the unitive dimension of sexuality is recognised as exclusively pertaining to personhood and as an expression of interpersonal intimacy. Therefore we see a duality between that which is unitive/personal and that which is procreative/biological, a reflection of the classical soul/body dualism.

In this context, motherhood is subordinate to the dominant subjective criterion of pregnancy understood as a biological process. Women do not recognise the inherent value of their female corporeity, but see it as an instrumental value that depends on their will. Because of this, when an unplanned pregnancy occurs, they see it as an accident not included in their plans, a risk for their conjugal intimacy, or a refutation of their personal control over their procreative ability.

Contraception harms the image and likeness of God, that is, the person. It not only contradicts the objective truth of the existential value of the sexual drive, but it places a marriage in a position of rejection before the creative act of God. It distances the couple from their role of responsibility for a new life, and it makes them objects or things in their intimacy, thus impairing spousal communion as nucleus of the family.

The technological-scientific and utilitaristic mentality regarding the

use of contraceptives indicates that women are being reduced to objects. It facilitates sexual activity that lacks benevolent love and receptiveness to life, and thus betrays the nuptial language of the sexual body. Moreover, it is widely recognised that contraceptives facilitate both pre-matrimonial and extra-matrimonial sexuality. Both cases are a distortion of the sexual act understood as an intimate affirmation of the full dignity of the person, as well as an unconditional gift and receptivity of love. In other words, it is apparently expressed in unconditional love, but it is contradicted by the use of contraceptives.

On the other hand, the responsible and generous regulation of natural fertility in the family and for the family is an antidote to the contraceptive mentality. According to the transcendental dimension inherent in the organic vision that accompanies natural regulation, human beings discover who they are by means of authentic self-giving to the other in the totality of their being, and the other receives it in reciprocity and complementarity. This gift and reciprocal acceptance establish interpersonal communion directed towards a common good which is the good of participating in the work of creation by contributing to the life of another person. It reaffirms what we said before, that the body is not a mere instrument belonging to a person or a biological function subject to manipulation according to personal desire. It is the expression of the truth and goodness of a person's being as love and life. It represents a style of life that respects the person as an incarnate and sexual spirit, and respectful of the female cycle of fertility as an inspiration of matrimonial chastity.

b) Concerning abortion

The baby that is being formed in the mother's womb should not be taken from her, even if the pregnancy is the result of rape or a violation against the woman's will. This is because the woman is not only the vital support and means of survival for the fetus, but also because a woman

undergoes an ontological change when she becomes a mother. Her life is intertwined with that of her child as they form a new and unique union. I shall develop this point towards the end of my talk.

c) Concerning the substitution of procreation with artificial fertilisation

The integrity of the intimate and fecund conjugal act contrasts with technologically assisted fertilisation. Obviously, technological interventions that are used to save the life or health of preborn babies are generally justified. On the other hand, technology used arbitrarily to satisfy individual desires alien to the laws of human nature and the integrity of the person as incarnate and sexual spirit, is problematic.

Life initiated – not generated – in laboratories is governed by the logic of production, that is, of efficiency and quality control expressed in a language where motherhood is “to deliver a perfect baby”.¹³

We maintain that, in the light of a personalistic reading, fertility is not measured on the basis of its efficiency but on the person. In answer to artificial fertilisation, sexual activity should be affirmed as a gift that is receptive to life, and that develops according to its own dynamics. Life develops and its fruits are not seen as a simple biological product or consequence, but as an authentic direct fruit of love.

The separation of the elements integrated in natural maternity – the conjugal act, gestation and childbirth – ends up by violating the profound, complete and permanent interpersonal bonds that belong to marriage. We recall how *Donum Vitae* affirms that life is a gift that should be facilitated in such a way that respect is shown to the dignity of the child who is receiving it and the parents who generate and transmit it.¹⁴

¹³ Cf. W. MAY, *Catholic Bioethics and the Gift of Human Life*, op. cit.

¹⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation *Donum Vitae*, I, no. 6.

Again we start off from our anthropological affirmation of a person as spirit-incarnate-sexual in receptivity of another human person. From this basis we derive some guidelines.

It is of fundamental importance to preserve the intrinsic unity of the conjugal act in its love and fruitfulness. This means to preserve the nature of the conjugal act as an expression of loving union and transcendence of love towards new life. The conjugal act, understood as gift and communion, shows that sexual corporeity facilitates the spirit. It is a question of preserving the integrity of procreation as it generates life in harmony with the dignity of the people involved (father, mother and child). To generate human life, to procreate a person, must remain in continuity with the conjugal act in its full integrity, as a faithful expression of the language of corporeity as inseparably a gift of love and gift of life. To “generate” life is not to “produce” life by technological means (artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilisation, surrogate motherhood).

To “generate” presupposes an intimate nuptial act, a completely personal bond, in order to live in accordance with the language of corporeity, in order to collaborate with God in the creation of a new unique being, an expressive of his oblatinal and exclusive love.

To “produce”, on the other hand, is suggestive of an external act that is based on the quality of a production that is technologically programmed according to manufacturing logic, in order to obtain a baby who is planned and calculated as a biological event. This logic will not succeed in cancelling the suspicion that the person of the baby could be considered to be an object, a thing, or that the personal loving encounter between spouses could be subject to the ethically debatable technological mediation of assisted fertilisation. In this case, the gifting and encounter of bodies and spirits is substituted by dehumanising technological innovations, in the drama of those who desire a child as if that were a right to be exercised at all costs.

Artificial fertilisation, unlike natural procreation, dehumanises life

and does not represent true progress in shaping conjugal relationships, or filial and fraternal relationships.

Another guideline is to respect the “language”, the nature of corporeity as a nuptial gift. Corporeity, in the personalistic sense, is experienced not as a mere instrument of a spirit, or as a spiritual field of operation, or even less as a property to be manipulated in its moral neutrality. Corporeity is an integral part of a person and therefore it is a dimension of every human possibility. It holds dignity and reflects the nature of interior decisions and attitudes.

d) Concerning surrogate motherhood

The problem with surrogate or substitute motherhood centres on the approach of the maternal figure and her decision to place herself at the disposal of the couple who commission the IVF. From her point of view, the birth is a kind of instrument by means of which she gives herself to the couple by emulating the gift of spousal love which corresponds, in the natural course of events, to marriage. Surrogate motherhood makes the integrity of the family vulnerable as well as the marriage bond, because it separates the physical, mental and moral elements of which motherhood is composed. We should remember that conception does not only generate new life, but also the ontological means of being parents. As *Donum Vitae* reminds us: “Surrogate motherhood represents an objective failure to meet the obligations of maternal love, of conjugal fidelity and of responsible motherhood; it offends the dignity and the right of the child to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up by his/her own parents”.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, A, no. 3.

e) Concerning heterologous transfer

A woman's generative ability is not the mere production of ova. It is the nuptial self-giving that belongs exclusively to spousal love, of which a woman cannot dispose independently of the bond with her husband. The transfer of the heterologous embryo that is abandoned and exposed to the risks of freezing, can, at the very limit, be considered to be an act of charity, but it is ambiguous and wrong. It puts in serious danger the dignity of the marriage union and of motherhood which is inherent to the spousal bond. The conjugal act, by definition and as a source of new life or the source of maternity, has an essential significance, absent in an individual person, but present in a woman/mother only in communion with her spouse. Motherhood is not a decision independent of the expression of intimate love between spouses. The uterus is not simply a reproductive organ. It is the organ that allows a woman, as a mother, to first embrace her child as a baby at the embryonic stage, who exists before the implantation in the endometrium.

The embryo-baby has the right to give itself to its mother from the beginning of its existence. It also has the right to receive an oblatinal welcome from its mother. In her turn, the mother has the right to give herself completely to her child and the duty to recognise the intrinsic dignity of the baby. She does this by giving herself to the baby, but always with/through/for her husband.

f) Concerning the medicalisation of childbirth

In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II warned us of contemporary tendencies regarding life: “[The human being] is concerned only with ‘doing’, and, using all kinds of technology, he busies himself with programming, controlling and dominating birth and death. Birth and death, instead of being primary experiences demanding to be ‘lived’,

become things to be merely ‘possessed’ or ‘rejected’”.¹⁶ The medicalisation of childbirth loses sight of the personal reality of the baby, the mother, the father and the entire family.

IV. PREGNANCY-MOTHERHOOD-FAMILY: THE UNITY OF GENETIC, GESTATIONAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL MOTHERHOOD

Let us return to these last points and concentrate our attention on motherhood in the context of the family understood as a “school of deeper humanity”.¹⁷

Pregnancy in itself is union between the mother and the preborn baby and the baby when it is at the embryo stage. The baby is hers in essence, not simply placed inside her, but linked to the woman as a mother. She is literally the baby’s home, but not in the sense of simple lodging, but a home in the sense of dynamic dependence and interaction, in that she shares with the fetus biological intimacy and mutual spiritual understanding. In fact, the embryo assumes a certain degree of control of the mother’s endocrinological system. Natural pregnancy gives a genetic and gestational bond, and the expectation of psychosocial and moral continuity of life, both of the mother and the child.

The mother, in particular, experiences an ontological change during pregnancy, because this experience involves her whole being. She does not experience it as an accidental process or one that can be easily separated from her personal intimacy. In view of her personal psychosomatic union and of her bond with her child, a woman is transformed into “woman and child”. This is very different from holding a baby in her arms, because her whole corporeal system is directed and regulated

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 22.

¹⁷ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Contemporary World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52.

on the basis of the presence of the baby as an embryo or at the preborn stage. Objectively and subjectively, the woman is, as a mother, a transfiguration of her being at the existential level, consistent with the intrinsic dignity of her being as a female person. There is no other bond like it. It is a unique union.

In the context of marriage, the mother/child union is not an event separate from the conjugal act, but is its extension and incarnation. The woman becomes a mother in giving herself at a physical, emotional, cognitive and spiritual level in the spousal bond, a gift that is extended to the child. The child is born through the work and grace of God, through the loving collaboration of the couple. They are enriched and not at all disoriented by this divine intervention. In this way, the child is a living sign of the spousal union of the parents, and they, in their love, transmit life according to a genetic composition of mutual complementarity that is at the same time unique in its configuration. The child expresses the parents and belongs to them.

In relation to the family, motherhood is the custodian of life *par excellence* and a point of stability for interpersonal encounter. The teaching of virtue is a primary task for the family.

“The full realisation of conjugal life and, in consequence, the sanctity and stability of the family, depend on the formation of conscience and on values assimilated during the whole formative cycle of the parents themselves. Moral values seen in the family are transmitted to the children more easily. Among these moral values, respect for life in the womb and, in general, respect for people of every age and condition have great importance. The young must be helped to understand, appreciate and respect these fundamental values of existence.¹⁸

¹⁸ CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, no. 52.

V. THE FAMILY AS A PLACE FOR INTERPERSONAL ENCOUNTER AND SAFEGUARDING OF LIFE

To conclude my talk, I shall suggest some points to take into consideration that are of particular importance today in renewing the family from its natural roots and in openness to the divine plan.¹⁹

The family is subjected to continuous change because of the evolution of society and that of its own members. This transformation requires renewal on the part of all in certain ways of thinking and behaviour, and an attentive attitude towards understanding and dialogue (think of the pyramid and patriarchal/nuclear conjugal family, and its internal renewal).

The family should be prepared to resist certain ideals imposed by a materialistic and consumer society. They must show preference for the weakest and less fortunate in society, and always stand by those who are marginalised.

The family has primary responsibility in removing inequality from society. Inequality is not combatted by those who do not love. At the present time, many families do not love because they hold attitudes of oppression and domination. Equality is the fruit of love, and the fruit of equality is trust and respectful dialogue about natural differences.

One objective of the family is to make its members free people. That means to empower each person and to make each one a better and freer person. In order to reach this objective, it is necessary to be fully a person and to cultivate inner freedom as a condition for outer freedom. Only love lived to the full within the family enables its members to be instruments in making people and society free.

The baby contains within him/herself all that a person can have: consciousness, self-awareness, freedom, and a desire for love and transcen-

¹⁹ Cf. E. LUGO, "Visión orgánica de la familia", lecture given at the Seventh Bioethics Day, Nuevo Schönstatt (Argentina) 2005.

dence towards the noble and beautiful. It is the parents' duty to take care that this potential in the child can be fulfilled. The child can speak and ask, and is fully entitled, as he/she grows, to discuss, give reasons, and expect the parents to take what is said into account. It is in the family that a child must feel recognised, appreciated and supported. Children learn within the family to live with others in dialogue and respect, and to have a spirit of initiative, creativity and responsibility. It is here that children should have no fear of the world or the opposite sex, or have feelings of servility, resentment or thirst for power over others. Here they learn not to give most value to possession of material goods, but rather to aspire for the honesty of a virtuous life and an integral character.

This new education must support respect for the person, especially the person of the child, and also acceptance of intergenerational and interpersonal tensions as a source of growth in terms of freedom and responsibility. Paternal authority is a means, legitimate only in order to stimulate the life and personal development of the child. The authority of the parents should be firmly rooted in reciprocal trust and support of ideals that both the father and mother recognise as the goals of education. There must always be maximum attention to the originality of each child as a unique person worthy of respect and unselfish love.

Beyond the fact that they constitute real challenges, the loss of consistency in the nature and in the institutional dimensions of the traditional family (extended), the growth in individualism and the democratisation of the man/woman relationship, the widening of the functional space of women in society and particularly in the professional/employment field, are positive elements for discernment and development. We see that the family is not only necessary for the emotional stability of individuals, but it rediscovers its importance in reinforcing the feelings of belonging, filiation and solidarity, all necessary for social cohesion. Even among the younger generations it seems that higher consideration is emerging for marriage and family, as well as a defence of values associated with stable families and fidelity.

Confirmation of its vitality and importance can only show us how much the family, understood in the wider sense, as the original form of organisation of affectivity, procreation and family ties, cannot be lacking in any society. However, the present challenge is how to connect the essential functions of the family with the various forms and behaviour patterns of family coexistence that are far from the definition of the conjugal and nuclear family. We believe that the family is resistant and fragile at the same time. The family as an institution is guaranteed to continue, even though it changes in time and space, because it is entrusted with essential functions for human fulfilment.

Why must we believe in the family and in motherhood as the heart of the family?

First of all, it is because God firmly believes in the family. God created the human being in his image and likeness, man and woman. God wanted to place the love between man and woman at the centre of his plan, and God is made present to us as Trinity in order to encourage communion between people. The fact that God has placed the family as the foundation of human coexistence and as a paradigm of ecclesial life, means that everyone must give a decisive and convinced response, as we are told in *Familiaris Consortio*: “Family, become what you are!”²⁰ John Paul II added soon after this when speaking to families: “Believe in what you are”.²¹ We believe in the family because it is essential for the upbringing and fulfilment of persons in their dignity as a non-negotiable value, for their integrity as incarnate spirit and for their transcendence that longs for truth, goodness and beauty without limits.²²

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 17.

²¹ IDEM, Address of John Paul II at the Prayer Vigil of Families in St. Peter’s Square, 20 October 2001.

²² Cf. E. LUGO, “Visión orgánica de la familia”, *op. cit.*

We believe in the family that is receptive to the gospel of love and life. The magisterium of the Catholic Church insists on the essential unity between sexuality and procreation, even when technoscience separates love, the conjugal act and offspring. This insistence is based on the interpretation of that which is according to nature, receptive to the will of God the Creator, personal and provident. The doctrine of the Church safeguards what it ultimately means to be a person. This is why the Church feels obliged to speak out on an area that is so delicately private and subject to personal freedom like this area of spousal relations. It would be imprudent to think that we can leave in second place the richness of faith, prayer and grace of the sacraments as they are responses to the challenges discussed in this Congress, and instead to seek solutions that are more and more technological. Of course they are not to be underestimated, but they require anthropological and ethical substance. We must resist the temptation to substitute spiritual directors and confessors with psychologists, and to attribute less importance to a dialogue of reconciliation sustained by prayer and nourished by faith.

We are each building a future without lapsing into dogmatism or fatalism in face of the challenges presented by the family crisis. Dogmatism and fatalism are signs of desperation and go against the hope that inspires us, when grace sustains our nature. We believe in the family when we accept the authentic meaning of parental authority, both in the family itself and in educational institutions; when we educate the citizens of the future by communicating the human values that are fundamental for society and nations; when we introduce our children into society; when we recognise that the family carries out an essential function, that of being the common patrimony of humanity.

As the Second Vatican Council tells us, the family is “the first and vital cell of society”.²³ Therefore, it is the first human community and it humanises society.

²³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 11.

Family life as a true experience of communion and participation is an essential contribution to society. Families, more than any other association, have a very special link with society, the nation and the State, because they are “natural” institutions of people, the base cells of society, guardians of life and humanity.

Karol Wojtyła, in his essay on the family as *communio personarum*, tells us: “The family is the place where each person is revealed in his/her unicity and uniqueness. The family is – and it should be so – a special ordering of forces in which each person is important and necessary because of who he/she is, an ordering of what is most intimately ‘human’, built on the value of the person and directed in every aspect towards that value”.²⁴

The family, as a community of love and life, is a sovereign society, a fact which means that we support the “rights” of the family. The institution of marriage is founded on a couple and has its own justification in reciprocal perfection. This perfecting is not possible without affirming the rights of the couple. These rights are to live together, in dialogue, in a commitment to support life, in daily effort and in giving to others and to society. The family is not an entity at the service of the species, the race, or any particular ethnic group, nor even less of the nation as an anonymous contributor or in the interests of economics.

²⁴ K. WOJTYŁA, *Metafisica della persona. Tutte le opere filosofiche e saggi integrativi*, Milano 2005, 1464; see also JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, no. 6.

Men and Women in Family, Society and Politics*

JANNE HAALAND MATLARY**

The Letter to the World Episcopate on *The Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* underlines the equality in human dignity yet the fundamental difference between the sexes. One and equal in human dignity and personhood, yet different in a much more profound sense than the biological one; “their equal dignity as persons is realized as a physical, psychological and ontological complementarity” (no. 8). This sameness is thus fundamental; as persons, but the difference is also fundamental – it is not only physical, but also ontological.

WHAT IS THE FEMININE?

This Christian anthropology of the sexes is far more profound than the simple biological reductionism of some, or of the social constructivism of many – it provides the answer to the pilot’s question of where to steer between the Scylla of biological determinism and the Charybdis of the contemporary pervasive constructivism. Thus, Christians as well as non-Christians ought to study the rich and deep anthropology of the sexes in Catholicism in order to find solutions to the pressing problems in the areas of family and women’s policy. The analysis in this *Letter* is

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something novel and promising in a world where often biology has been given too much emphasis – women have been seen as child-bearers only, and still are seen as such in many cultures – and where the constructed nature of certain sex roles have been over-emphasized as well, rendering the difference between the sexes insignificant, as a mere ‘social construct’. The latter ideology is a major problem in the West today.

In Catholic anthropology the sexes complement each other, not only in a biological sense, but in the totality of life. Thus, parents are not only biologically father and mother, but are different and complementary in a profound sense for the children. This point is missed completely by those that can only point to biology as the difference; and denied by the social constructivists who would argue that motherhood and fatherhood are mere social roles that can be deconstructed and therefore have no importance for the life of the child. The latter argument is used by homosexual lobbies in order to redefine the heterosexual family, often successfully, as fewer and fewer understand how and why the sexes differ.

Even more fundamentally, the relationship between the sexes – and indeed Christian life itself – is aimed at one thing only, namely, the imitation of Christ through *self-giving* and *service* to others. This ideal is of course not realized much of the time, and relationships are marked by power struggle and conflict, yet this can be overcome, the Church teaches; and the ideal therefore remains the norm. Moreover, women’s special capacity for self-giving in pregnancy, child-birth, and care for the infant is held up as the reason for women’s special capacity for such self-giving, which is the essence of the feminine itself. It is also the exemplar of true Christian behaviour.

Thus, the startling implication of the Catholic teaching on the feminine is that women have a special ability to ‘humanize’ the family, and also society and politics, provided such self-giving occurs. If a woman can live out this self-giving, this altruistic life, she ought to influence

society to the maximum extent, and men should look to her to imitate her way of altruistic love. While both sexes share in their Christian ability for self-giving love, the Church emphasizes that women have this ability in a specific way because of motherhood – and motherhood is not only physical.

In a situation where a woman lives her Christian vocation this actually means that women have a privileged place in both Church, family, and society. The *Letter's* analysis on this point should be required reading for all those who think that women have a lesser place than men in Christianity. It is in fact a woman, Mary, who is the model of Christian life. The paradox to modern man is of course that Christian power is equal to service. When the reflection about women's role in church and society starts from the assumption that power is domination, the analysis falters. I return to the implications of this for feminism below.

What are the implications of this anthropology for the family, work life, and politics?

WOMEN'S SITUATION TODAY

Historically women are in an unprecedented situation, at least in the West, but increasingly so all over the globe: they are educated and have professions outside the home. The Catholic Church has always placed major emphasis on the education of girls and women from the very beginning of the school system in Europe, and is today one of the foremost educators in the developing world as well. From the very beginning, Christianity made women and men equal in an unprecedented way, both in Jewish as well as in Roman society. Education is the major force of change in traditional sex role patterns: the entry of women into all professions in society and into political roles is truly new and truly revolutionary.

The dates for women suffrage remind us of how late and following

much suspicion and even resistance women achieved equal political rights: The Finns granted suffrage to women in 1906 as the first state; Norway in 1913, while a major state like France did so only in 1946 and the canton of Appenzell in 1986. The same picture holds for many professions, where women have only been allowed for some decades. Yet today women are both politicians and professionals in all fields, and the majority of students are female in many universities.

Yet they are very often discriminated against in the competition for getting jobs and for keeping them, men often setting the standards and providing the only role models. In addition, they are unable to combine having children with having a career outside the home. Women are in fact often forced to choose between motherhood and their other work. Finally, those that opt for the profession of the work in the home, are unable to have this choice due to individual tax policies that force both parents to work outside the home – a fact in most European states. The problems facing women in the developing world are worse – women are responsible for not only their own family, but whole communities, in an endless work day, often amidst poverty and deprivation. “If one educates a woman, one educates a village”, as a saying from Africa says. Thus the Church puts major efforts into the education of women. Yet generic problems of poverty and health remain, and Sub-Saharan states are ‘forgotten’ in the world economy.

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF A ‘CATHOLIC FEMINISM’

I use the term ‘Catholic feminism’ here in order to underline the difference between this model and the common ‘equality model’ of feminism discussed below. However, it is a term that is not strictly correct because there is no such thing as a separate Catholic feminism, nor should there be. Catholics do not have special political programs for them – what is Catholic is what is universal, however disputed that may

be. Furthermore, there is no reason to single out women and make an ideology called feminism for them only – we speak about women *and* men and their cooperation and difference; not about women alone. Thus, my terminology is not very good, but serves a didactic purpose.

What does the *Letter* advise about the practical and political implications of a Catholic, a ‘new’ feminism? The implications of its anthropology are radical: As stated, women should be able to choose to work full-time in the family; women should not be forced to choose between a professional job outside the home and having children; and finally, the family comes first in the order of importance; society and politics are the result of the work in the family, so to speak. This turns the usual power-based analysis upside-down, and it lays down the auxiliary role of state and society according to the principle of subsidiarity: the family is not a ‘client’ of the state; but the state and society depend on the family and its work to bring up morally sound citizens.

Are women and men to be treated equally or unequally? The *Letter* is very clear on the fact that women and men are different, and women must therefore not be treated as if they were men. This is a radical point: Most feminism of the nineteen-seventies, far advanced as a political project in my native Scandinavia, have worked on the equal treatment assumption. But discrimination occurs not only when *like* entities are treated in an unequal way; but when *unlike* entities are treated in like manner. The contemporary policies for men and women’s roles often treat men and women in the same manner; and this is called equality. These policies have led to many advances for women in work life, but the major issue of difference has not been properly taken into account. Women have been allowed to imitate men, but have failed to achieve policies that really take motherhood into account and also that women lead and work in a different way from men, if they are true to the Christian ideal of service. By this I mean that any women can imitate an aggressive leadership style if that is the going rate in a company, but women do not like to have to behave like this. It is usually very dif-

ficult for a woman leader to be respected as authoritative on her own, female terms. Yet it happens, with experience and education. The point here is that women should not have to imitate men because they are not men: their femininity is not only motherhood, but much more than that.

“EQUALITY” FEMINISM: THE PERVASIVE MODEL

Scandinavian feminism, the foremost example of this equality tradition, has rightly made way for women in all professions outside the home and in political life, but has simultaneously made it impossible for women (or men for that matter) to work in the home, with the children and with house-work. The political project has been very much a matter of ensuring that women are not discriminated against in work life, but also ideologically to abolish the traditional house-wife and ‘patriarchal’ family structure. Thus, while one can enjoy a full year of paid maternity leave (and some weeks of compulsory and paid paternity leave), the tax system does not consider the family unit, but only individual incomes – making it rather impossible for one spouse to work in the home. The conditions for motherhood are thus excellent until the child is one year old; and after that the only viable ‘solution’ is to place the child in Kindergarten.

When the Christian-Democrats introduced a payment to parents who wanted to stay at home with the child – usually the mother – equal to the sum that the state expends on a place in a public Kindergarten, the outcry from the Socialists was strong: “Women are forced back to the ‘house-wife role’; feminism is reversed”. The fact that many mothers actually want to stay at home with small children was and is unacceptable.

This model of feminism is clearly deficient, albeit pervasive as a model for the Western world, especially in Europe. The ideas and trends that come from Scandinavia in this respect are empirically

important. The *Letter* refers to attitudes as the main obstacle to achieving the right modes of male-female cooperation in contemporary society. This is an important point: trends, mentality and common assumptions dictate much, also in terms of policies.

In Europe these attitudes are very much against work within the family, and indeed, against the family as a concept itself. The steep decline in birth rates is an alarming fact which only now gets some attention from policy makers, but far from sufficient to be effective. The family is not only contested in its heterosexual identity by homosexual groups that are achieving 'family rights' in country after country, but has been seen as a repressive and 'bourgeois' institution by most brands of feminist thought. The most disdained person of such a family is naturally the house-wife, who does not claim her 'rights' to a life outside the home but who serves the other family members with her daily work. To 'liberate' the woman from the house-wife's work and make only the work outside the home relevant, was the key theme of the feminist movement of the nineteen-seventies. The trends that matter especially here are: individuals have their rights, the family as a unit recedes radically in importance; the work that counts and has any status is that which brings power/money.

The individualist trend is extremely pervasive, and ultimately implies that the family is not relevant any longer as a political or legal category. There is indeed a major difference between the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which lays down that 'the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society', and the rights-based individualism to have children (a non-existent human right: only children have rights to their parents), to take one example. The rights-based argumentation of modern politics is also now the mode for family and feminist policies. But if all that can exist are individual rights (with no duties), then the family must break down.

This kind of rights-language goes hand in hand with the power-analysis of feminism: The family and its work counts for nothing in the

hierarchy of power; it brings no money and no power, but is 'only' a service to others. What matters for women is to have at least fifty-per-cent of all important positions in society, including politics. (Since men have dominated here for so many centuries, women should perhaps have more than fifty-per-cent). Quota systems are sometimes introduced to achieve this.

The political focus is then only on the spheres of politics and professional work outside the home. The life of the family is not really relevant in the power-analysis, for it at best hinders a woman in realizing her talents. Having children becomes a liability for her, as she competes with men for attractive positions. Employers even ask her whether she has children, plans to have them or how many, while men are never asked such questions.

It is worth mentioning that, in recent years, both men and women as parents take more and more interest in balancing work and family life, and have re-discovered the importance of having enough time and energy with the children and each other. Family policies in some states allow for flexible working hours, especially for the mother with small children, and for 'life-phase' planning so that one works less – also the father – when the children are small. Yet it remains a fact that the point of departure here is the work situation, and not the family as such. The family becomes a 'problem' that must be dealt with in order to have happy employees.

To conclude: through the lens of power and the assumption of equality – that men and women are equal – children and family become an obstacle to women's self-realisation. This obstacle can be dealt with through various policies, but this is an entirely 'negative' view of the woman: she is a man '*manquée*', so to speak. The man remains the model for both professional work and politics in this model, and his family and fatherly obligations are never counted. The fact that women become pregnant, give birth, and nurse, and that they by nature take care of the infant – all this becomes a liability to full 'equality' and must be remedied to the extent possible.

This model of feminism is premised on the male model for women: We imitate a male work life and a male political life, where all that can be hoped for is a parity between the sexes. The underlying logic is one of power: women should have equal access and equal privileges.

‘CATHOLIC FEMINISM’: IMPLICATIONS

Against the ‘equality model’ a ‘Catholic feminism’ relies on very different principles. First, the ideal driving force for human work is service to others. The supreme importance of this implies that the powerful positions in the world are not always those that are seen as such – a startling idea to most. Second, women are not equal to men apart from in their personhood. They are as discussed, different in more than the biological way. Mother and father are not substitutable, but complementary. This means that the mother’s work with children is of a very special importance, especially when they are small. The father’s complementary position with respect to his children is naturally also deeply important, but the mother is the key person for the very small child. However the spouses divide house-work and work with children between them, it remains that this work is of the utmost importance not only to the children, but also to society.

The service to others that parents show their children, and which children in turn learn, explains why the family comes first in the order of importance, as vitally important for the other spheres of life. It is in the family that one is loved unconditionally, perhaps only there. It is therefore in the family that love is taught. The service of politics, for example – the word ‘minister’ means servant – can only be ‘replicated’ when one has learnt to love in a self-giving way. Otherwise political service becomes a search for political power – as is so often the case. The sharp difference between service and power illustrates the point of radical difference between a Catholic feminism and current feminist thought.

The family is of key importance: it is not an aggregation of individual preferences, but an organic unity, the fundamental and natural unit of society, as all the major human rights instruments lay down. The spouses have no rights to have children, either individually or as a couple, but if they have children, these in turn have rights to know and be raised by their biological parents, as the Convention on the Rights of the Child states. Moreover, mother and child are entitled to special protection from the state, again according to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The state is also obliged to support and privilege the family.

The classic human rights texts sum up much of what a Catholic feminism implies: the family is recognized for its pre-eminent worth to the state and society, and motherhood is emphasized in the same manner. The family is protected from state interference while being the object of special support from the state. Most importantly, the family is designated as the 'fundamental unit' of society.

Contemporary feminist policies are at best tolerant of the existence of the family, at worst at war with it. But no feminist model exists – apart from the Catholic one – where the family is the fundamental unit of society, coming first in the order of importance, before society and politics. As I have pointed out, the 'balancing' of work life and family life at best puts these two spheres of life on equal terms, thereby neglecting the pre-eminent importance of the family. But if it all depends on the family – good citizens, good employers, the very moral fibre of society and politics – this is surely not right. The appreciation of the key role of motherhood is only possible if the family is recognized as literally speaking the 'fundamental unit' of society, as the building block.

But this is very far from the case in Western politics today. When Norwegian Christian-Democrats suggested quantifying the cost of a divorce rate of fifty-per-cent in terms of the illness and other costs resulting from broken homes, they were immediately accused of discriminating and scapegoating divorcees: were they any less important to the well-being of society than the ones who stay married? Could anyone

say that their children were less happy and harmonious? Thus, the current neutrality on the part of the state in most Western states – not stating any more that the family is what the UN declaration tells us it is – means that the family as a concept disappears more and more as a politically and legally relevant category.

A Catholic feminism, however, has as its core principle that the family is first in the order of personal and societal importance. Therefore the work done in having children and raising them is unequalled. Mothers come first in doing this work when the children are very small, but fathers are of another, but equal importance. Modern family and work life luckily takes more and more into account the role of fathers at home with children, and modern fathers want to be with their children to a far greater extent than what has been the traditional case. Work hours need to be compatible with family life – one cannot work late every evening and be a parent.

Another assumption of a Catholic feminism relates to the ‘power versus service’ concepts. This implies that work done well is not only done well in a professional sense, but also in an intentional sense. The ‘success’ of work relates to its substance in the Christian ethical sense. To serve others is nobler and more Christian than to serve one’s own interests. In this respect a Catholic feminism differs completely from current feminist thought. It is also clear that work-as-service makes work in the family something extremely valuable and important. Seen thus, work is more than just the tasks undertaken, it is also cooperation and society with others. With education, women are in all professions, and should be there.

CONCLUSION

In this short article I have only been able to touch on some points of how a different ‘feminism’ based on Catholic anthropology looks. It

has often struck me that most current commentary and critique of the role of women in the Catholic Church commits the very same fallacy as the feminist critique of the family: based on a power-assumption, one is bound to go wrong. The difficulty and challenge for a Catholic is precisely in accepting and living the demand for self-giving love, and to understand that this is the kind of power Our Lord spoke of and taught. This demand is naturally the same for both sexes, and sexual difference has no bearing on the need to understand this and live accordingly. Yet as this *Letter* states, women are at a particular advantage in doing this, being privileged to give life through birth and to care for the completely helpless child.

II.3. The role and mission of women

Introduction

GIORGIA SALATIELLO*

An introduction to reflections on the role and mission of women is a particularly complex task, especially nowadays. This is because different dimensions must be taken into consideration, and none of these can be omitted if we do not wish to present a restrictive distorted view.

First of all, we must point out that role and mission cannot constitute the point of departure because they do not contain their justification within themselves. It is drawn from a wider understanding of the human person, and each person's basic relationship with God in the Church, and in the Church together with the modern world in which they live and witness to their faith.

Every culture and every society prescribes certain roles and tasks to be accomplished, both for men and women, but Christians have the responsibility to discern, within the inevitable plurality of contexts, what corresponds to the truth of God's plans for his creatures.

This truth, therefore, is the criterion by which to measure every existential proposal that must represent, in daily life and in history, the way to live out the human vocation, one that is unique and different at the same time.

As regards unicity, this vocation derives directly from the fact "that human nature as constituted by the distinction of the sexes [endures] throughout as a metaphysical reality".¹ It is to be self-aware and free, so

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¹ K. RAHNER, "The position of woman in the new situation in which the Church finds herself", in: *Theological Investigations* 8, London 1971, 75.

that in each one's inseparable corporeal-spiritual reality the *imago Dei* is imprinted, the foundation of each one's dignity and absolute value.

Studies that deal with the difference between men and women, however, cannot fail to include their common nature. Both "share the same humanity, while, on the other hand, humanity does not develop if not in the concrete existence of male or female".² This existence expresses, in its original duality, the fullness of the image of the Creator, and the Creator immediately calls both of them to a responsibility and task that they must carry out together.³

It is only with these essential premises that synthesise an inclusive anthropological vision that states that "the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible",⁴ that it is possible to give some introductory remarks on the role and mission of women, because they emerge from the deepest reality of femininity.

It is precisely in relation to this profound reality that a precondition immediately arises that must be faced and resolved before proceeding to a further declaration. This is because today there are many who deny its existence. They say that we cannot speak of "woman" but only of "women", and they recognise only their diversity while denying that there is a female specificity that is valid for all.

Undoubtedly, respect for plurality of cultures and traditions makes it very difficult to say "what" a woman, in her existential situation, should do to fulfil her specific femininity,⁵ but this does not mean, on

² G. SALATIELLO, "Uomo-donna: « dal fenomeno al fondamento »", in: *Studium*, 2 (2005), 259.

³ Cf. GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Letter to Women*, no. 8: "To this 'unity of the two' God has entrusted not only the work of procreation and family life, but the creation of history itself".

⁴ 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*, no. 14.

⁵ K. RAHNER, "The position of woman in the new situation in which the Church finds herself", *op. cit.*, 75: "In the same way there is very little that can validly be asserted of the woman as a single and entirely homogeneous type with a definite concrete position in the Church capable of being investigated".

the other hand, that it is not possible to accept “who” she should be in order to live in consonance with God’s plans for her.

The first crucial reflection to be carried out in this direction concerns the impossibility of separating the identical humanity of man and woman from their difference which is unsurmountable because “from the first moment of their creation, man and woman are distinct, and will remain so for all eternity”.⁶

This statement has, above all, a clear anthropological relevance. This is because it implies a clear stand against any reductive and partial vision that may downplay the difference in order to emphasise equality, or on the contrary, in order to emphasise the importance of the difference, it minimises the fact that, if we do not have identical human nature, even distinguishing is reduced to referring to pure biological data, and that, in itself, has no significance for personal existence.⁷

This leads to an outcome of primary relevance for the concrete existence of each woman, although it is evident that in a different context of reflection this should be equally applied to men. That consequence is that the fulfilment of a woman’s humanity is inseparable from the specific nature of womanhood.

Human nature, in the image of the Creator, cannot therefore exist in an abstract way, independently of its concretisation in man and woman. Therefore, all efforts made by women to enhance the value of their own femininity are their special contribution to the implementation of shared human values.⁸

⁶ 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*, no. 12.

⁷ J. DE FINANCE, *A tu per tu con l'altro. Saggio sull'alterità*, Rome 2004, 20-21: “One does not oppose the other if only because they are one for the other and their unity will be even closer and more affirmed to the extent that their diversity is better respected”.

⁸ 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*, no. 14: “It is appropriate however to recall that the feminine values mentioned here are above all human values”.

With these considerations as a starting point, it is possible to identify the twofold origin of the role and mission of women that is recognised in their membership of Christ's Church.

On the one hand, it should be remembered that it is their constitutive female identity that allows them, with totally original characteristics, to fulfil the human heritage that belongs to women as much as to men. On the other hand, their role and mission derives and draws strength from their faith when it is accepted and lived out with commitment and coherence.⁹

These two aspects just mentioned, however, although they can be different when reflecting on them, they cannot be separated in a life of faith, because "to think of spiritual life as sexed or neuter would keep us anchored to the body-spirit dualism",¹⁰ and so hinder the possibility of a faith that could involve the person totally in all dimensions.

At the centre of this life of faith there is, as Benedict XVI reminds us in the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, the capacity to love. It is present in us, and has its source and guarantee in God's love, for God loves us first and gives us the possibility of responding with love to God and to others.¹¹

This capacity for love, however, precisely because it comes from the most intimate core of a person, it cannot be abstractly neuter either. Undoubtedly, "there is a feminine way of living agape, and there is a masculine way"¹² that confers on love its human concretisation that allows each of the two sexes, and here we direct attention to women, to

⁹ K. RAHNER, "The position of woman in the new situation in which the Church finds herself", *op. cit.*, 91: "The contemporary age of the Church will demand from woman as a member of the Church that she shall devise a kind of religious life which is clear enough to understand and powerful enough in practice really to be lived effectively".

¹⁰ X. LACROIX, *L'alterità uomo-donna*, Magnano 1996, 9.

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 17: "He has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love".

¹² X. LACROIX, *L'alterità uomo-donna*, *op. cit.*, 27.

open up to God and to others with all the richness of their personal sexed identity.

In this sense, the acquisition of a profound awareness of one's own femininity and its value, not only bio-psychological, but radically spiritual, allows a woman to fulfil, with respect for her singularity and in every dimension of existence, "the fundamental human capacity to live for the other and because of the other".¹³

Having identified the twofold origin on which the role and mission of women is founded, it is now possible to identify the moments through which it is possible to arrive at indications that can combine the value of womanhood, that is always to be affirmed in the singular, with the great number and variety of situations in which women live today and are called to be witnesses to their faith. In considering here the vocation of Christian women, it is, first of all, essential to underline that "in the Church, woman as 'sign' is more than ever central and fruitful",¹⁴ because women can witness to values that, although certainly not exclusively feminine, are in fact lived out with more spontaneity by women.

However, we do not intend by this to absolutise an historical model that would condition womanhood. Many Christian women could not identify with this because of their different historical and cultural origins. It is only intended to place in evidence the profound consonance that women hold with that ideal of life that the Gospel offers to every Christian.¹⁵

All that happens in real life in various contexts and states of life,

¹³ 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*, no. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 16: "Far from giving the Church an identity based on an historically conditioned model of femininity, the reference to Mary, with her dispositions of listening, welcoming, humility, faithfulness, praise and waiting, places the Church in continuity with the spiritual history of Israel".

passes through a deeper understanding of the concept of Church considered in its relationship with the women who are part of the Church.

Only a woman herself is able to identify the different ways she can carry out her Christian existence, and hence the role and mission that belong to her. However, that is only possible if she, by living out her baptismal identity to the full, feels that in her belonging to the Church she, through communion, is an irreplaceable member, and if she is aware of her singularity that allows her to witness in a unique way to the one Gospel message that calls on everyone, men and women.¹⁶

In order to summarise conclusively, we must emphasise that today more than ever, each woman who recognises her role and mission must always remember that “it is the Church that presents itself in the women who are its members”.¹⁷

¹⁶ K. RAHNER, “The position of woman in the new situation in which the Church finds herself”, *op. cit.*, 90: “Precisely because this creative task belongs exclusively to her, and because it is a new task, it can only be performed by her when her life as a mature Christian derives its strength from the centre and source of the Christian reality”.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 460-461.

The intellectual development of women and women as educators

CARMEN APARICIO VALLS*

It was necessary to decide on the approach to take with this theme because it can be addressed from several different perspectives: the psychological, sociological, etc. I opted to make a study of three women, all from the same period of history, and to see what they can tell us from their different backgrounds and milieus in Europe about women's contribution to the intellectual and educational world: Maria Montessori, Carmen Cuesta and Edith Stein. They are pioneers and examples of an approach to education that requires a specific anthropology. They are women who integrated intellectual development with the role of educator. I shall not draw general conclusions from these three cases as I am very aware that the range of examples is too small, but I shall try to identify some common traits that characterise their contribution as women.

Behind each one of these women there are very many more names and very many more faces.

MARIA MONTESSORI (1870-1952)¹

Maria Montessori was born in Italy on 31 August 1870. She was the first woman to study medicine in Italy. In 1896 she graduated in medicine and began to work as an assistant in a psychiatric hospital. In 1898, when

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¹ Relevant to the topic are the following works by M. MONTESSORI: *Antropologia pedagogica*, Milano [s.d.]; *The Discovery of the Child*, New York 1972; *Il metodo della pedagogia scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle case dei bambini*, Città di Castello 1909; *L'autoeducazione nelle scuole elementari*, Roma 1916.

attending a congress on education in Turin, she began to think about the relationship between medicine and education. She was particularly interested in the question of children with problems. In 1904 she obtained a post as external lecturer in educational anthropology at the university of Rome. She remained in that post for four years. At that time she published her book *Pedagogical Anthropology*. Her teaching was not confined to the university curriculum. She studied philosophy and took courses in experimental psychology in order to find out about the problems that had caught her attention. We note in particular the way she constantly carried out 'research' and how she always wanted to learn more. In 1906 the Director General of the Roman *Istituto dei Beni Stabile* invited her to take over the direction and organisation of a school for young children in a working class area. The school opened a year later on 6 January 1907. Here she began to apply to education what she had learned in the field of medicine.

She used her preparation in psychiatry and educational methods to propose a new method based on observations of children where the child, rather than the teacher, is at the centre. The atmosphere in the school changed to one where the child was the measure of everything. Her method involved two players, the child as the main player and the educator as a "humble teacher". The surroundings were important, and materials and activities had to contribute to the integral development of each person.

Her work took the line of pedagogical anthropology, and she insisted on teaching methods that were open to the social dimension (understood as relationship and freedom). She wanted education to be based on love. The purpose of education is to help children gain autonomy both physically and in willpower, that is, in freedom. This is related to the forming of conscience, of teaching people to think, act and desire for themselves. That is why education cannot be limited to a transmission of information. It must work towards the development of people's abilities and of personality, and it should lead to a synthesis between the human, biological and moral aspects.

Maria Montessori believed in guided self-directed learning. We should not impose a mould on children but allow them to bloom according to the design for which they were created. Montessori maintained that each person is unique and inimitable, and for that reason we need to provide ongoing observation and personalised teaching. She believed in the human person and that each one possesses great potential. Education should draw out this hidden potential. This means awakening children's abilities and helping them to discover things, to discover themselves, and to get to know themselves.

She aimed for a kind of education that would stimulate the development of children, and for that reason she placed particular attention on education of the senses. Montessori was very aware that the mind of a child is psychologically different from an adult's. Children have a greater capacity to assimilate what they see and to learn without needing to reason (which does not mean that they do not use their ability to reason). That is why educational methods should be appropriate for each age. They should follow a course that goes from the sensory to the rational because the aim of education is to reach the inner faculties by means of the sensory faculties. Education is not limited to training the five senses. It also includes learning to appreciate beauty, learning to interiorise (the importance of silence is significant), to be orderly, etc., and all that helps to free our deep-down abilities and creativity.

She is convinced that people can improve, and that is what drives her unstinting dedication. Education consists in allowing a person's latent energies to emerge and spiritual values to flourish. These values have to be transmitted in a way that they are not simply add-ons. They are acquired, assumed, and become part of a person's character.

A teacher must observe how each child is developing and becoming a person, and help them to discover their inner strength which is in the making, yet it transcends them because it is not theirs. A teacher oversees to make sure that nothing is lost or sent off course. Teachers are instruments who must be aware that they stand before the revelation of

a child's being. That is why they must change their attitude towards the child. Educators are people who are instruments at the service of a child's growth but who must not remain outside their task like simple passive observers. Montessori prepared educators. A teacher's function is to indicate and point towards the goal because educating children is to help them to find themselves, with all the richness of that great marvel which is their inner selves.

This requires a great deal of preparation and uncommon human qualities. Educators must be prudent, tactful and multi-talented. They must have the ability to observe wisely, to know when to be present and when to step back, when to speak and when to remain silent. They must overcome the danger of pride (to think that the result is due to them) and of anger (to be annoyed when a child does not respond as expected).

The task of education means accepting that there is a higher Teacher who is the true Teacher. That is why we have to recognise our own limitations, to be patient and humble, and to be able to continue our own education. According to Sofia Cavalletti, the method has spiritual depth and, although there is no explicit reference to the Catholic faith, it is filled with a religious sense.² Maria Montessori is sensitive to the lack of spiritual unity that characterises our century, and in her method she integrates all the elements that shape personality thus making it possible for religious experience to be part of a free and responsible person.

See the following studies on Maria Montessori: M.J. NIETO MUÑOZ, "Pervivencia de María Montessori en el diseño curricular de la educación infantil", in: *La mujer, nueva realidad, respuestas nuevas*, Sevilla 1991, 246-254; G. BATTISTA, *L'educazione religiosa in Maria Montessori*, Roma 1989; *La formazione dell'uomo nella ricostruzione mondiale*, Proceedings of the 8th International Montessori Congress, Roma 1950; S. CAVALLETTI – G. GOBBI, *Educazione religiosa liturgia e metodo Montessori*, Roma 1961.

² Cf. S. CAVALLETTI – G. GOBBI, *Educazione religiosa liturgia e metodo Montessori*, op. cit., 14.

In her book *The Absorbent Mind*, we find a prayer that is a good synthesis of her thinking on education:

“Help us O God, to enter into the secret of childhood, so that we may know, love and serve the child in accordance with the laws of Thy justice and following Thy holy will”.³

CARMEN CUESTA DEL MURO (1890-1968)⁴

Carmen Cuesta was born in Spain in 1890. She studied at the Higher College for Teacher Education (science section) and was the first woman to obtain a doctorate in law. She taught at the teacher training college in Teruel, and she was the director of the first residence for women university students in Spain, in Madrid. She was also director of the Catholic Institute for Secondary Education and teacher of statute law in the Catholic Action School for Women. In 1924 she spoke at the first National Congress on Catholic Education on the theme “The social action of women in primary education”. In 1925 she set up a juridical-administrative office under the aegis of the Teresian Association with the aim of offering help to women public servants,⁵ a clear

³ M. MONTESSORI, *La mente del bambino*, Milano 1952, 46.

⁴ See the following studies on Carmen Cuesta: C. MARTÍNEZ – R. PASTOR – M.J. DE LA PASCUA – S. TAVERA (and others), *Mujeres en la historia de España. Enciclopedia biográfica*, Barcelona 2000, 486-488; M.A. ORTIZ, *América seductora, Carmen Cuesta, buen rumbo y buen timonel*; C. MARTÍNEZ PÉREZ, “Carmen Cuesta del Muro. Una revolución en el pensamiento feminista durante la II República Española”, in: *La mujer, nueva realidad, nuevas respuestas*, Sevilla 1991, 199-206; see also some of her works: *La vida del obrero*, Madrid 1915; *La sociedad de gananciales*, Madrid 1930, and numerous articles in *Boletín de las Academias Teresianas* and in *Boletín de la Institución Teresiana*.

⁵ “The Office will deal with the following: 1. Provide information on a) all questions regarding legislation on public education in our country, b) all forms that refer to these questions, c) administrative procedure (governmental). 2. The presentation of controversial-administrative resources” (*Boletín de la Institución Teresiana*, XII/nº 144, November 1926, 40).

effort to advance women educators. In 1926 she took part in a Catholic Action expedition to Latin America in order to exchange educational experiences. That year she also represented Spain at the Inter-parliamentary Assembly held in Paris. She spent part of her life, 1933-1953, in Latin America, working for the Teresian Association and for Catholic Action. Her sense of universality grew here and helped her to establish bonds with other cultures. All levels of education in Latin America, from associations of university professionals to rural schools, benefited from the cultural and evangelising enthusiasm of this woman.

She defended human rights, with special attention to the areas of women and education. During the dictatorship of President Primo de Rivera, she was one of thirteen women⁶ who took part in the National Assembly (1927-1929), a corporative advisory board with the task of drawing up a new legal charter. At that assembly she asked for “the creation of secondary schools for girls and a women’s faculty of medicine, and also an increase in salary for teachers in state primary schools”.⁷ She was also noted for her contributions to the Civil Code reform, especially in relation to the civil rights of women. Of course, she was a feminist in a certain sense, but she herself described how she understood feminism: “I support a wholesome feminism that does not create hatred or antagonism, but that proclaims a more solid peace: a kind of feminism that only raises its voice forcefully to protest against neglect and injustice”.⁸

If we look at her writings in the Bulletin of the Teresian Academies,

⁶ Of these thirteen women, seven were involved in education. Carmen Cuesta was secretary.

⁷ C. MARTÍNEZ – R. PASTOR – M.J. DE LA PASCUA – S. TAVERA (and others), *Mujeres en la historia de España*, op. cit., 487.

⁸ Speech given on the *Día de la buena Prensa* in the seminary of Palencia by Carmen Cuesta del Muro, in: *Boletín de las Academias Teresiana*, III/nº 43, July 1916, 672. A series of articles on the same theme were published between 1932 and 1933 in *Boletín de la Institución Teresiana*, collected under the title *Las mujeres y el derecho*.

later to become the Bulletin of the Teresian Association, a news journal addressed to all those people who participated in various ways in the activities of that Association, we can see how she was a wonderful educator. She frequently addressed young university students and students in teacher training colleges in her writings,⁹ showing great concern for the training and development of these young women.

It is interesting to see how she evaluated the society in which she lived, and how she tried to discover the causes in order to change the effects. She was concerned about the loss of religious faith and wondered what could be done to restore society to Christ.¹⁰ Her strength and determination can be seen in those writings. She continuously exhorts the readers not to remain passive, but to “set the world on fire” and to give witness.¹¹ She was convinced that victory could only be possible if people would join forces. She gave first place to love, the force that can save the world.¹² What moved her to this was the search for truth. That is why she insisted on the need to never neglect education and not to allow oneself to be carried along by the latest trends.¹³

Carmen Cuesta saw education to be the lever that can revive the world, in other words, it is necessary if social change is to be possible.¹⁴ She looked to Saint Teresa of Avila as a role model for educators. Although the saint’s writings were not “pedagogical”, she found that they contain sufficient elements to build a system of all-round educa-

⁹ The writings are of various kinds: lectures, spiritual meditations, biographies, writings on juridical topics, etc.

¹⁰ Cf. “Palencia. Conferencia dada por la señorita Carmen Cuesta”, in: *Boletín de las Academias Teresianas*, IV/nº 51, February 1919, 977-978.

¹¹ Cf. Speech given on the *Día de la buena Prensa* in the seminary of Palencia by Carmen Cuesta del Muro, *op. cit.*

¹² Cf. “Palencia. Conferencia dada por la señorita Carmen Cuesta”, *op. cit.*

¹³ Cf. C. CUESTA DEL MURO, “Los estudiantes de hoy. Una lamentable equivocación”, in: *Boletín de la Institución Teresiana*, VII/nº 84, November 1921, 32-33.

¹⁴ Cf. IDEM, “Al profesorado femenino”, in: *Boletín de las Academias Teresianas*, II/nº 26, October 1917, 403-404.

tion.¹⁵ Moreover, Saint Teresa is an encouragement for women to see how we can influence society if we have education.¹⁶

The writings of Carmen Cuesta often describe how she understands education: education consists of planting seeds so that they will bring forth good fruit; it is working the soil of minds and hearts; it is guiding people towards their purpose in life; this is why the first step is to know the goal to which we want to arrive.¹⁷ However, education, as well as forming personalities, has a unique social dimension: "Through education we form characters and personalities, and the sum total of these is an essential factor in resolving the difficult question of the destiny of humankind".¹⁸ She would give particular emphasis to the strengthening of will-power. She called for renewal in educational values so that words like "vocation", "ideal" and "almost divine mission" could regain their significance and substitute others that were suffocating the project.¹⁹ She could see that people have tremendous abilities that need to be drawn out because our society tends to stifle them.²⁰

We also find a series of advice to educators to help them in their

¹⁵ She wrote on this theme in various issues of *Boletín de la Institución Teresiana*: "Pensamientos pedagógicos de Santa Teresa", VIII/nº 95, October 1922, 1-2; "Pensamientos pedagógicos de Santa Teresa", VIII/nº 96, November 1922, 20-21; "Santa Teresa en la Pedagogía", VIII/nº 97 December 1922), 34-38; "Velada en honor de Santa Teresa de Jesús. Discurso de la señorita Carmen Cuesta", VIII/nº 100 March 1923, 82-84; "Pedagogía de Santa Teresa", IX/nº 107, October 1923, 1-4.

¹⁶ Cf. C. CUESTA DEL MURO, "Pedagogía de Santa Teresa", *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁸ C. CUESTA DEL MURO, "Pensamientos pedagógicos de Santa Teresa", October 1922, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Cf. IDEM, "Pensamientos pedagógicos de Santa Teresa", October 1922, *op. cit.*, and "Santa Teresa en la Pedagogía", *op. cit.*

²⁰ Cf. IDEM, "Rápida. Diez minutos observando la vida", in: *Boletín de las Academias Teresiana*, V/nº 67, June 1920, 252-253.

²¹ Cf. IDEM, "Pensamientos pedagógicos de Santa Teresa", November 1922, *op. cit.*, and "Santa Teresa en la Pedagogía", *op. cit.*

task: know the person you are educating and love that person,²¹ do not be centred on yourself, be flexible, have self control, etc.²²

What is the secret of this woman? On what did she base her ideas? Why was she so concerned about education and the defence of women in society? If we read Carmen's writings we realise that she had a very deep and coherent faith that guided her life, an open heart and great personality. We see a cultivated woman who had a huge capacity for expressing feelings with deep faith and a clear awareness that she should not be silent.

EDITH STEIN (1891-1942)²³

Edith Stein was born in Germany to a Jewish family on 12 October 1891, the day of Yom Kippur (day of reconciliation), a date that would always hold much significance for her. In 1906, at a time when she was passing through a stage of religious indifference, she decided to abandon her studies. She would take them up again two years later. She began her university studies in her home town, Breslau. Then in 1913, two years later, as she was interested in phenomenology, she moved to Göttingen to continue her studies with Husserl. While there she joined the philosophy society. It is from this period that we can begin to associate other names with her who influenced her life in some significant way: Adolf Reinach, Max Scheler, Heidegger, Hedwin Conrad-Martius (a Protes-

²² Cf. C. CUESTA DEL MURO, "Pensamientos pedagógicos de Santa Teresa", November 1922, *op. cit.*, 20-21.

²³ Cf. C.M. STUBBEMANN, *La mujer en Edith Stein: antropología y espiritualidad*, Burgos 2003; J. HEIMPEL, *Il rapporto tra la persona e la comunità nella visione cristiana di Edith Stein*, Roma 2005; L. CANTO, *Sguardo essenziale: antropologia e teologia in Edith Stein*, Roma 2005; I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, "Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación", in: *Religión y cultura*, LIII/nn. 241-242 (2007), 463-497; D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein* (www.filosofico.net/edithstein.htm).

tant who was her godmother at her baptism), Przywara, etc.²⁴ During the First World War she worked as a nurse. This was a time of spiritual growth, of resizing her scientific dissertation, of greater openness to others, and of an encounter with suffering and pain. Her friend Reinach died in 1917, and this led her to a spiritual path that transformed her thirst for truth into a thirst for God.²⁵ In 1921, when she was reading the Life of Saint Teresa, she found the Truth and she converted to Christianity. On 1 January 1922 she was baptised. She died in 1942 as a Discalced Carmelite in Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

We could say that her academic career was a failure in a certain sense. In spite of her brilliant studies and various attempts, she could never attain a university professorship for the simple fact that she was a woman. It was because it was impossible for her to be accepted at the university that she worked in a girls' secondary school, and it was here that, providentially, she became interested in educational science and the education of women.²⁶

Edith liked to go to the root of questions that touched on the human aspect of problems.²⁷ We see that she had a keen intellect and also great moral rigour that was in keeping with her search for truth. She never tired of searching. She was passionate in her search for truth, and she always combined that with study.

She was a woman of many qualities who was always attentive to contemporary currents of thinking. She was a philosopher, but she was interested in anthropology (influenced by Scheler), in pedagogical science understood as the theory of educating²⁸ (she applied her anthropo-

²⁴ For more about these influences, see, among others, D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein*, op. cit.

²⁵ Testimony of this given by Reinach's widow was very important (cf. D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein*, op. cit.).

²⁶ Cf. D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein*, op. cit.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, "Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación", *op. cit.*, 477.

logical proposals to education), and in political and social life. She took part in feminist movements that were campaigning for women's right to vote. Edith promoted the role of women in the Church and in society through her writings, lessons and lectures.²⁹ At the same time she reacted against the current secularised feminist trend. She felt that a battle between the sexes destroyed the dignity of man and woman. She made a contribution to the understanding of State and its relationship with nation.³⁰

It is impossible to separate the religious dimension from her work because everything about her speaks of integration. In her philosophy we see her ability to integrate the elements she has in hand. Her philosophical works are the result of the challenges she met in life.³¹ She writes in a straightforward way that is easy to understand. She combines theoretical insight and practical application. She shows special intuition for all that she experiences and for all that refers to human beings. Her anthropological studies are impressive for her power of synthesis of the concepts of modern and scholastic philosophy and the truths of faith in a single anthropological vision.³²

A synthesis of her thought had already appeared in her doctoral thesis on empathy. She relates empathy with the other acts of knowledge: empathy implies going beyond oneself to be with the other.³³ A person's interior space is important. It is there that the encounter takes place of all that comes within and that relates with the conscience. In her study of the human person she makes a clear distinction between influence and determination. All our experiences influence us, but do

²⁹ Cf. D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein*, op. cit.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³¹ Cf. J. HEIMPEL, *Il rapporto tra la persona e la comunità nella visione cristiana di Edith Stein*, op. cit., 35.

³² Cf. *ibid.*, 22, 403; see also D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein*, op. cit.

³³ Cf. J. HEIMPEL, *Il rapporto tra la persona e la comunità nella visione cristiana di Edith Stein*, op. cit., 45; see also D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein*, op. cit.

not determine us. There is something in the human person that helps us to go beyond influences or to react against them. Conscience is crucial, and freedom has an important role. Her research on empathy helped her to make an in-depth study of the human person, and this led to her experience of faith.

Edith saw that to educate was to help a person become what he or she was intended to be, and this is only possible when we know what the human person is and which are the ways that will lead them to their goal. According to her Christian vision of the person, she would say that the aim of education is that each person should become what God wants for him or her. That means to be authentically oneself, and that is to be a reflection of Christ. Edith's thinking was that everything, but especially this point, must contain an encounter with Christ. Here we recognise another characteristic of this great woman: her way of integrating faith and reason, experience and reflection. For her, a synthesis between theological anthropology and philosophical anthropology is natural: "An anthropology that does not take into account the relationship between the human person and God cannot be complete and cannot serve as a basis for pedagogy".³⁴ Her writings would highlight the wonder of the person which is precisely that of being a person. In virtue of being a person, the human being is responsible for the building of him/herself as a person. In order to build ourselves as a person, we need a process of education. When Edith spoke of education she was referring to an integrated education, that is, "developing the whole human being with all of his or her faculties and abilities".³⁵ This explains the importance Edith attached to education that "is not the

³⁴ E. STEIN, *Obras completas*, IV, 588 (cit. in: I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, "Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación", *op. cit.*, 480, n. 34).

³⁵ E. STEIN, "Verdad y claridad en la enseñanza y en la educación", in: *Obras completas* IV, 66 (cit. in: I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, "Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación", *op. cit.*, 483, n. 41).

possession of external knowledge, but is the shape that human personality assumes under the influence of multiple educational forces”.³⁶ Her idea of education “forms part of a world view according to which the reality of God is the ultimate basis of the world, of history and of humankind”.³⁷

She would explain how a person has an interior form that has to become the power that shapes his/her being.³⁸ This interior form is the natural desire of God (a person is a transcendent being by nature) as too is supernatural life. The exterior form has to be moulded.

In her work she gives ample space to the role of the teacher. She distinguishes four elements in education: the goal of personal development, the person (child) who must develop, the hands that work and the instruments used, and the process of education.³⁹ Education is mainly God’s work and educators are his instruments. In order to explain this, she makes use of images that highlight the growth process: the educator is like a gardener or a potter. It is to bring to light that which in some form already exists. That is why educators do not create. Their function is to help to bring to light that which God has already created. Educators are instruments that are gifted with intelligence and will, and as such they need to know how to proceed in order to achieve the goal.

³⁶ E. STEIN, “Fundamentos de la formación de la mujer”, in: *Obras completas* IV, 197 (cit. in: I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, “Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación”, *op. cit.*, 483, n. 43).

³⁷ I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, “Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación”, *op. cit.*, 493.

³⁸ Cf. E. STEIN, “La colaboración de los centros conventuales en la formación religiosa de la juventud” (Conferencia n° 5, Munich 1929), in: *Obras completas* IV, 113-114 (cit. in: I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, “Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación”, *op. cit.*, 486, n. 52).

³⁹ Cf. I. DELGADO GONZÁLEZ, “Edith Stein: una visión filosófica y católica de la educación”, *op. cit.*, 484, n. 46 (citing a 1929 lecture by E. Stein on “La colaboración de los centros conventuales en la formación religiosa de la juventud”).

We could say that the aim of education is to assist the full or integrated development of a person. That is why educators must have clear ideas about the truth of the person. They must help people to think well, that is, train people to be led by clear principles in life, to know where they are going.⁴⁰

If we wish to understand Edith's concept of the role of educators, we must remember the kind of circles in which she moved. Her vision of the person is as a relating human being, one who dialogues, one who is able to communicate with others. That is why education, the task of the educator, must take into account the inner aspects that are ordered by reason, and together with these, the inner or spiritual aspects. All of this is accompanied by training of the will and self-control. Edith insisted on the importance of the educational process beginning from within.

Key words for her were: freedom, spirituality, clarity and truth. Faith and reason were two key elements, two paths leading to knowledge of God and knowledge of humankind. This is one of the most interesting aspects of her anthropology.

A characteristic of the personality of Edith Stein is integration between thought, life experience and mystical experience.⁴¹ We could say that she showed the way towards cultural and social change in Germany in the 20th century.

CONCLUSION

As I said at the beginning, I am not attempting to arrive at general conclusions, nor can I claim that what we see in these three women is something exclusive to women. However, these three women impressed me very much.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 482, n. 39 (citing a 1926 lecture by E. Stein on "Verdad y claridad en la enseñanza y en la educación").

⁴¹ Cf. D. FUSARO, *Edith Stein*, op. cit.

It is interesting to note that each of them, from different fields – medicine, law and philosophy, in spite of very different backgrounds, are all very concerned about the human person, and each of them, curiously, demonstrates this interest through a concern and involvement in education. We can easily see in them the relationship between professional training and development and social service.

It is also interesting to see how, in spite of different academic backgrounds, they come to similar formulations and specific proposals. The person to be educated is placed at the centre: each one should give the best and most of oneself. The educators are key in this. Their responsibility is to motivate the learners and help them to improve, to be respectful, to know themselves, and to discover their own calling in life. These women speak of education as “integral training and development” that helps each human being to be a person.

The novelty that they contribute, through their intellectual training, can be identified in a creativity that does not confuse adaptation with conformism, and in the struggle for a high ideal that brought them out of themselves in order to show concern for others, and in their capacity for integration. None of them led a life without difficulties, but they overcame limits and found alternatives, not allowing themselves to be discouraged by circumstances.

The most eloquent word to be found in the development of educational thought by these three women is they themselves. They lived the ideal that they were putting forward. They lived their vocation to the full. However, is there something deeper lying under this interest in anthropology? What kept them going, and what was their point of reference? I believe that it is their Christian vision of the world and of humankind together with a search for Truth, and their deep conviction that the treasure we have received in clay jars must be preserved and that the hands of the Potter never cease to mould the broken clay and to repair the cracks so that nothing good will be lost.

Women's religious sense

CRISTIANA DOBNER, OCD*

I am grateful to those who formulated this title because they have very deftly avoided a trap that is common nowadays, and that is to have titles with two parts like “Women and ...”, and there can be anything at all after the “and”.

I would like to begin, in fact, by explaining the terms of the title. In a way, it is like a favourable wind. Mine is a solitary reflection that was born in a Carmelite's cell, with ears open to hear the voices of life, their plurality and their echos, with a long concealed gestation of the themes: vigilance in the encounter, bowing with love over the Scriptures, continuity of life, of love, of respect; reflection ready to pour out in the warmth of the encounter, a “*diakonia of the truth*”.¹

Intelligence is theoretical as well as religious. For this reason it strives to discover within itself the reasons for the philosophical question that leads to a challenge of the human condition. It is to be women who think as women by overcoming all androcentric claims. Edith Stein put this very clearly: “Perhaps the passive attitude of women in the Church for centuries and centuries has come to be second nature, allowing for some exceptions (Teresa of Jesus, Hildegard von Bingen, Catherine of Siena, etc.) but as exceptions that prove the rule. The twentieth century asks for much more!”.² We are now living in the twenty-first century, well aware of the greatest epistemological revolution of history (K. Børresen) that has taken place.

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¹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, no. 1.

² E. STEIN, *La donna – il suo compito secondo la natura e la grazia*, Roma 2007, 299.

To look inwards, to enter within oneself, to look at the world with eyes wide open, as Edith Stein would say, is the door that allows us today to enter into the “interior castle” described by Teresa of Jesus, the Spanish mystic, as “a divine moment in the story of humankind”. This is affirmed by Emile Cioran, and, according to Maria Zambrano, philosopher and author, it provides us with a stairway. This is therefore the point where the meeting between God and the person takes place, and, from the religious point of view, with which we are dealing here, both women felt total freedom. We are speaking of that passionate search for truth joined with austerity and simplicity of life that conferred upon both Carmelites an almost inimitable authority.

Therefore, why do we need to study the association between women’s religious sense and the feminine? It is in order to overcome the epistemological relegation to which women’s religious language has been subjected. It is so that we will not permit thought in duality and in outward appearance with respect to being, even when we are aware of the disproportion between finite and Infinite, visible and invisible. As Max Scheler said, it is to seize the requisite sensibility by the tender strings that draw all things in the kingdom of the invisible. This sensibility is distinguished by certain peculiarities: a potential to give attention to phenomena; to their variety, richness and specific traits; a stubborn determination to save them. However, it also opens up with sensitivity to the transcendent with respect to reality, and learns the skill of silence in order to enter into true communication and in order not to reduce others to objects.

Within a certain dimension of the inner life there is a perception of the *kairòs*, of that concept of history that cannot count the passing of time because that concept belongs solely to *chrònos*. However, we belong to the *kairòs*, the Lord Jesus, because we are a response and not the first word in the creative tension of the yet unfulfilled design of God for the human person.

What are the theoretical main points of the relationship of the

woman/feminine and the religious sense that is to think of oneself with new mental categories?

I shall briefly name them. It is to redefine female nature in the light of new formats and cease using those no longer in force; to speak of nature and at the same time to save freedom; not to close the dualism male/female into a closure of difference but to project oneself in a harmonic dualism. This is because reason and freedom are common to men and women, to the *humanum* in its entirety. It is also an invitation to truth and happiness in the truth and not to a short-lived happiness that does not have roots in authentic egotropism; an invitation to immersion in the real as being essential (Maria Zambrano teaches that it is existence that is metaphysical because it vibrates with a meaning that grounds it and awaits it); an invitation to the ecclesial act, act of faith. It is the visibility of the presence of women/the feminine in society and the Church.

This is a critical exercise in *kinesis*, in becoming, and certainly in repositioning oneself in dialectic, but also in attention to the guiding ideas of that exercise.

Therefore I suggest that we go out through a doorway in reverse, from inside to outside, and from there be able to follow, question, weigh up and recognise the *conatus cognoscendi*, “the courage to engage the whole breadth of reason”,³ as Benedict XVI expressed it.

Does this mean that the religious is a place of the absolute for women? To exit in order to enter – but where? Is it true that woman is the only place without a place? Can she find it?

Today, for those of us gathered here, I am drafting the response in the interrogative: what is the place, the *tòpos* of women? What is the meaning of a woman's *energeia*, pulsating, reasoning, sensitive? We must follow that silence in which Adam was seized by a *tardemah* and

³ BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with the representatives of science in the University of Regensburg, 12 September 2006.

Yahweh created woman in a theophany that only she could see, thus giving her that freedom that in a relationship of faith can really be restored.

The Word of God is clear, but the same cannot be said of its incarnation from the earliest centuries until now, either by state or ecclesiastical governments, that have been totally (or almost) managed by men, with an absence that spoke of exclusion.

I am referring to *Gal 3: 28*: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”.

Today we speak of reasoning and sensitive women, without emphasis on *maternage*, on housekeeping – not in an exclusive but in an inclusive sense – that runs the risk of putting in second place a change in women’s responsibilities that is taking place and that can be described more as “civil ethics than as natural destiny”. It opens up to other dimensions entirely, like professionalism, relationality and social visibility. We speak of their role in history with their own *èthoi*, that could be described as co-discipleship. This is a word that becomes Word of God hidden in the events and affairs of a people, recounted and reread in the service of faith and vibrant wisdom; greater attention to coherent rationality; symbols of daily life that disclose a hint of religiousness; a way of experience or “theology of the saints”, belonging to the mental universe of women/the feminine as a possible way of building philosophy, when understood according to frequent recourse to wisdom that could unite the search for truth with experience. We refer to the immediate that can be sensed spiritually, as a resonance of feelings, in continuous cross-reference; to the continuous creation of novel or ancient gestures, rooted in a different way of thinking that generates different language, that is not enclosed in the expressiveness of motherly care and procreation but that emanates from here; to the exchange of love, thought, art and language.

We speak, therefore, of the creation of a culture of interior life that

actively works “for”, that refuses to reduce people to a network of historical relationships, categorised as labour force with classifications according to systems and subsystems. However, does a primacy of culture over nature really exist (Elisabeth Badinter)? Which culture? Or do we find that there are synergetic forces at work? How is woman/feminine presented and defined?

It is in a two-way movement, the journey of the soul that is spent and created in approaching (or moving away from) the goal that lights up the path of life; in the footsteps of the itinerary of thought that women philosophers experience, in a restless search for their own vagrant souls (Adriana Valerio).

Here I propose my work hypothesis, the *humus* on which we should reflect.

I am speaking of Miriam of Nazareth, the *Theotòkos*, the carrier of God, as a woman and as a member of the feminine genius. Miriam is mother and sister, which we understand as terms of relationship. This is especially so in the song of the constellation in Christ, in which she appears as *apax*. She is the ideal model of communion that is absolutely full and yet of a differentiated equality. She lights up the Beatitudes as they “become more concrete and real the more completely the disciple dedicates himself to service”,⁴ and also the woman disciple in coming to the world.

We see Miriam as icon, a condensed image of presence, “all holy yet totally human, a woman rich in her femininity”,⁵ like *Urzelle*, primordial cells, according to Edith Stein.

It is necessary to identify the intertwining of parallel threads in order to express the unicity inherent in each person: the Truth that shows itself to minds by freely choosing the very form of its manifestation; affective existence as a necessary condition for truth; access to the theological forms of transcendence: access of the person to his/her own

⁴ J. RATZINGER-BENEDICT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, New York 2007, 73.

⁵ B. FORTE, *Maria, la donna icona del Mistero*, Cinisello Balsamo 1989, 5.

being and to awareness of the implication of truth on his/her action; the original form of conscience, that is, faith; desire as a loose thread at the end of an iron wire, a collection of desires that mould a style of life. To desire means to have meaning in front of you, or to place yourself in a situation that has sense, but it is precisely in desiring that we take action in a particular direction; the elementary universe as driving purpose of happening gifted with meaning: synaesthetic, metaphorical, emotional, affective; the attitude, second nature to motherhood, of caregiving and allowing others to grow. Miriam, indeed, offers the ontological and at the same time existential key because, as we are told in the Gospel, she “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2: 19).

In order to comprehend and grasp the consequence and semantics of these verbs, I need the midrash technique of *harizab*, of the necklace, that is as interesting as ever and opens up basic perspectives in order to understand the option of the chosen lemma.

It is, then, a sort of meditative bubble from which I am taking, under a number of profiles, the connotations that have emerged in relation to the two verbs. *Harizab* places us in an aggressive and dynamic climate. The verb indicates violent clash where there is war, of people who are in opposition and confront each other. It can also mean “extract from”, also a verb alive with dynamism. It means to incite, that is, to move. This verb never implies being static, conserving or immobility. It is a verb of radical movement. When it means a clash or verbal confrontation, it is nevertheless understood as a lively and contrary movement, or, with a different nuance, to bring or add something to a fact, and to confer it with a label that it did not have before.

This meaning in no way implies preserving in a cocooned and inert warehouse. Where Miriam “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart”, the verse in Luke is really very explicit. In Miriam’s soul, different situations and events moved and faced each other, always in action, in a turbulence that found its peace, and not a flat explanation or acquiescence.

The womb of words is the very *berith* of the relationship with Yahweh and with self, protecting and comparing. All the nuances indicated lead us to see Miriam's "treasured" and "pondered" as a disposition that is vigilant, thoughtful and protective, with care for relationships and for the events themselves.

It is a two-way disposition: of perfect stasis, in preserving what had occurred, and active movement, in pondering and wondering. However, it is not only reflective, but it is already, or for that very reason, prayerful, thoughtful and working in history.

To ponder means above all to think of oneself, of the Son, and of history that is taking place. It means to understand: Miriam reflects and thinks because heart, *lev*, in the language of the Torah and in Miriam's Semitic mentality, means the centre of a person, the inner being, a person's mind, soul, awareness, and above all, freedom. She had this freedom which she directed towards a specific end, and which determined all her intelligence, affectivity and sensitivity.

It is the disposition of a woman/the feminine, because it expresses the relationship between people, but which also indicates the purifying effectiveness of contemplation which we cannot understand in "treasuring" and "pondering", because the time has not yet come to carry out the Father's design.

"Treasured" and "pondered" is a path of thought, trodden by women/the feminine, as a desire for explanation, search, change and freedom. It is a complete way because it is a way thought out by the self and not poured on the self by man, an expression of reason but also a sphere in which the modulation of feeling is processed: imagination, memory, biographical intimacy and affective sensitivity. This is the premise, and also the result, of every thinking culture.

Miriam's memory is active in "treasuring" and "pondering", through the exercise of intuition, that is, awareness, perception, or feeling and exaltation in celebrating praise of God, in *epikleisis*, the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

It is already a sexualisation of the topic, typical of a woman, Miriam. She, in her femininity, confronts whatever is inevitably manifested by circumstances. It is no longer a closed discourse within conscience, the spirit and the people of Israel, but one that is broadcast to everyone.

Several interrogatives can be read that define the morphology and identity of the two memories that are in tension: on the sedimentation and in the feminine genealogical memory that Miriam holds with her past, present and future; on her individual memory that she would use with a gaze that could grasp even the most commonplace corners of daily existence for many years in Nazareth; on contemplation giving life to the encounter; on the search for the focal primary detail in the Son who lived with her.

The feminine freedom of thought, of “treasuring” and “pondering”, shows a humanism that has both limits and openness to what is beyond, declined in the feminine, and far too often on horizons lowered by self-referential functionalism. It is a humanism of gender that puts relationality at the centre, men and women woven together as a multi and inter-disciplinary instrument that can be enriched with a harmonic plurality of perspective and sensitivity between the self and the world.

It is a feminine awareness of moulding the self. She is a creator of life who allows the passage of a negative charge to a positive charge when she becomes a door that opens to true awareness.

As we refer to Miriam, I think the moment has come to express – following Edith Stein, but also proceeding ahead – what is absolute in the woman/feminine that we spoke of in the first question.

Feminine nature, according to Edith Stein, is distinguished by certain postures and a specific attribute, a genuine keystone that is summarised in a short sentence: “Whoever looks to Him and is concentrated on Him sees God, the archetype of all personality and the embodiment of all value”.⁶

⁶ E. STEIN, *Essays on Woman*, Washington 1996, 259.

I shall specify the postures: special receptivity of God's action in the soul and trust in Christ; to keep Christ before us; women receive the same gifts as men and the possibility of doing the same work – with men, together with them or in place of them; care and empathy; a natural desire to give oneself completely to another; the bodily capacity for sexuality; totality and determination; absolute purity which is freedom from false ties; obedience and service; participation in professional life.

How can we return to the original vocation of men and women as the *humanum* in its entirety? Edith Stein maintains that “only as God's children can this be attained”.⁷

To be specific: it is where the singular and the universal are found together, at the meridian; in the relationship of the one, woman/feminine, with other women and with Miriam, as roots that go deep; in finding in oneself, in inner gestures, in the deep existential attitude of praxis, in the various fields of action, in which philosophical thought finds its roots, at the frontiers between different times and worlds, in the plea for meaning that is required by salvation; in creating opportunities for encounter, issues, understandings, expectations, greetings, knowing and forging one's own path and making one's life an itinerant project that turns to the Father in Jesus Christ.

To sum up: in agapic intelligence which is aware of having received the gift of the Spirit and of allowing it to be remoulded until it becomes a living gift, *agàpe* itself, *mysterium* of love, the secret rhythm of action and contemplation for a culture of spiritual life that is active “for”, a force of women/feminine that transforms the *humanum* in its entirety, again expressed with authority by Edith Stein: “It is the vocation of every Christian, not only of a few elect, to belong to God in love's free surrender and to serve Him. Whether man or woman, whether consecrated or not, each one is called to the imitation of Christ. The further

⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

the individual continues on the path, the more Christlike he/she will become. Christ embodies the ideal of human perfection. In Him all bias and deficits are removed, and the masculine and feminine virtues are united and their weaknesses redeemed; therefore, His true followers will be progressively exalted over their natural limitations ”.⁸

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

Guardians of spousal and maternal love

BRENDA FINLAYSON*

Imagine, if you will, a typical family home. Outside, the night is dark and a wild storm is raging. The lightning is continually flashing, the thunder rolling and clapping, the wind is howling, lashing the rain in torrents. Inside, down the hallway, little steps come running into the parental bedroom where the mother is already awake. “What is the matter darling?” she asks. “I’m afraid”, comes the answer. “But you know you don’t have to be afraid”, replies her mother, “you know that God makes the rain, the wind, the thunder and the lightning, and that He loves you”. “Yes, I know that”, says the little one as she climbs up into the bed and snuggles into her mother, “but right now I need *love with skin on*”!

This reflection is about ‘love with skin on’.

Such a scene is common enough within what the Second Vatican Council calls the *Ecclesia domestica*,¹ the ‘domestic’ or ‘little’ Church, the family. They speak of a sense of protection, of spousal love and of maternal love.

Tangible ‘*Love with skin on*’, given to the world, was made possible by the trust in God’s providence and omnipotence, of a young Jewish girl of Nazareth, “engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary” (*Lk* 1: 27). With the Annunciation, Mary’s fiat – “be it done to me according to thy word”

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¹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11, and JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 21.

(*Lk* 1: 38), woman and man, the *humanum* in its entirety is given the first instance of “maternal love” from the Mother of God herself, and as a consequence, “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (*Jn* 1: 14). Thus the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became a member of an earthly family.

To explore this topic, it is necessary to define the terms: ‘Guardians’ - those who defend, protect and/or keep; ‘Spousal’- relating to the state of matrimony; ‘Maternal’- relating to the state of motherhood, and ‘love’ – an intense feeling of deep affection. This last definition is still too neutral. Pope John Paul II gave it a deeper dimension: “To love means to give and receive something which can neither be bought nor sold but only given freely and mutually”.² Spousal love is based on the tenet that “man was also entrusted by the Creator to the woman – they were entrusted to each other as persons made in the image of God himself. This entrusting is the test of love, spousal love. In order to become ‘a sincere gift’ to one another, each of them has to feel responsible for the gift”.³

Popes and poets, playwrights and storytellers, artists and artisans, musicians and songsters have all enriched society throughout the ages with their various interpretations of love. However, can one go any further than what Saint John writes of Jesus? Simply: “He Himself revealed to us that ‘God is love,’ (*1 Jn* 4: 8) and at the same time taught us that the new command of love was the basic law of human perfection and hence of the world’s transformation”.⁴

Deep emotional love between a woman and a man, in the Christian context, leads to marriage, “a sacred reality, a ‘sacrament’ or effective sign of God’s love and fidelity, which strengthens and divinizes it [...] It is a path to holiness, to being saints [...] it is also the beginning of a

² JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families*, no. 11.

³ IDEM, Apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 14.

⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 38.

family”.⁵ “When they become parents, spouses receive from God the gift of a new responsibility [...] In matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up through which each new person is introduced into the ‘human family’ and into the ‘family of God’ which is the Church”.⁶

“Womanhood and manhood are complementary” and “it is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds full realisation”.⁷ How often is this complementarity evident in the different, affectionate interactions between husband and wife, father and daughter and/or mother and son? Spouses, in their own way, reinforce the importance of complementarity, the importance of fatherhood and of motherhood and, by example, show complementary commitment and behaviour.

Therefore, roles in the family must be assumed. “Indeed, in a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them”.⁸

“No-one should naively assume that the journey of marriage will be easy. [...] A marriage is thus as much a journey of faith and trust, as it is of love. [...] A life-long commitment will always be tested. To reach old age in company with one’s spouse, family and friends, is a unique joy that can only be known by those who have persevered through difficult times”.⁹ This journey forms part of the vocation to marriage.

⁵ AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE, Pastoral document *Marriage in the Catholic Church. Frequently Asked Questions*, no. 1, June 2007.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, nos. 14-15.

⁷ IDEM, *Letter to Women*, no. 7.

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace 2008 *The Human Family, a Community of Peace*, no. 3.

⁹ AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE, Pastoral document *Marriage in the Catholic Church. Frequently Asked Questions*, op. cit., no. 15.

In her role and mission in today's society, how then can a woman defend, protect, guard, transmit and take in charge spousal and maternal love?

Mulieris Dignitatem shows the way: telling us that “in God's eternal plan, woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root”.¹⁰ The order of love “constitutes woman's own vocation” and “the moral and spiritual strength is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way. [...] A woman is strong, because of the awareness of this entrusting, strong because of the fact that God entrusts the human being to her, always and in every way”.¹¹

So, with responsibility and love, a wife and mother has the vocation to “entrustment of the human being”. The first recipients of this entrustment are her spouse and her children, because “the well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life”.¹² This vocation is not confined to within the walls of her home. “When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all persons”.¹³

Following on from *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II wrote in his *Letter to Women*: “Necessary emphasis should be placed on the ‘genius of women’, not only by considering great and famous women of the past or present, but also those ordinary women who reveal the gift

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 30.

¹² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 47.

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 29.

of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfil their deepest vocation”.¹⁴ “Christian spouses become a sign and an instrument of Christ’s love in the world. By their very lives they are called to bear witness to and proclaim the religious meaning of marriage, which modern society has ever greater difficulty recognizing”.¹⁵

“Authentic conjugal love will be more highly prized, and wholesome public opinion created about it if Christian couples give outstanding witness to faithfulness and harmony in their love, and to their concern for educating their children also, if they do their part in bringing about the needed cultural, psychological and social renewal on behalf of marriage and the family”.¹⁶ With their words and actions, women should defend and advance marriage, family and respect for the dignity of every human being, without, however, neglecting themselves, particularly their health which is so necessary if they are to be able to care for others.

To assist the woman in her mission of advocacy and to enable her to have confidence in enunciating true Gospel values, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, is an invaluable reference. Another useful tool was published by the Pontifical Council for the Family, *Lexicon: Ambiguous and debatable terms regarding family life and ethical questions*. The *Compendium* is a source of authentic Church teachings, and the *Lexicon* contains an illuminating collection of approved articles that clearly assist a woman to heighten her awareness “that the cunning use of ambiguous terms has reached worrisome levels”.¹⁷ *The Lexicon* seeks to

¹⁴ IDEM, *Letter to Women*, no. 12.

¹⁵ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 220.

¹⁶ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 49.

¹⁷ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Lexicon of Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions*, Human Life International, 2006, Preface by Card. Alfonso López Trujillo, XIV.

clarify misuse of language and to enhance understanding “ that one of the most disturbing symptoms of a weakening of morality is the confusion of terms which lead to degrading levels when they are used with cold calculation to contain a semantic change, changing the meaning of words in a deliberately perverted way”. It continues: “ Certain expressions exploit the uninformed people who use them and, since they are deceived by their ambiguity, they are not aware of their deception ”.¹⁸

As defenders and protectors of marriage, true spousal and maternal love, women have the responsibility to be educated and well informed in order to present the truth to others. Some examples of the deliberate misuse of the terms other than ‘gender’, are the proliferation of spurious ‘rights’, including those relating to ‘sexual and reproductive health’, ‘discrimination’, ‘pro-choice’, ‘free love’, and all the euphemisms for abortion and euthanasia. Women “ need now more than ever to have the courage to look truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or the temptation of self-deception ”.¹⁹

The Church’s social doctrine assures women that they have the task of ‘proclaiming’ the truth, and the task of ‘denouncing’ all that morally degrades human dignity. In charity, women have the task of defending marriage stating simply, gently and consistently that it can occur only between a man and a woman. Other unions, between same-sex or trans-sex couples presented under the guise of ‘gender equality’, are in truth, just unions, they are not marriages. “ Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you ” (*Jer* 1: 5). Nothing can be naturally formed in a womb from such a union.

In the ‘domestic’ or ‘little’ Church a mother lovingly accepts and protects the souls entrusted to her by the Creator. She guides and nurtures each child’s unique spiritual, affective, cognitive, psychological,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 58.

social and cultural development throughout the changing situations that come with each stage of her family's life cycle. By precept and example a mother, assisted by her spouse, transmits Christian virtues, family history and traditions, and creates 'self-identity and purpose' for her offspring. She provides formal and informal education within the home educating and training the next generation of parents, for values, attitudes and modes of behaviour are both 'taught and caught'. She also clearly appreciates the paradox that the more she gives love away, the more her store of it increases. She becomes "God's own smile on the new-born child".²⁰

She also needs to be aware of her 'hard work' for Christ, which Saint Paul speaks of "and this hard work indicates the various fields of the Church's apostolic service, beginning with the 'domestic Church'".²¹

Wives and mothers have been entrusted with the responsibility to proclaim the 'sanctity of human life' from conception until natural death, by counteracting the increasing acceptance that the developing embryo/foetus can be experimented with or destroyed with impunity. A recently consecrated bishop in my own country lately stated: "the littlest people, unborn humans, can be used as 'genetical quarries' and killed to make big people better", while another has observed that the most dangerous place for a person to be at this present time is in the womb.

In a spirit of charity, wives and mothers can engage in advocacy for the lives of the unborn, encourage the use of natural family planning, and spiritually and materially assist the vulnerable. They can affirm the single mother struggling to raise her children alone, work to alleviate poverty, be involved in pregnancy support services designed to uphold the dignity of pregnant women and the 'culture of life', and with compassion assist those women, who sometimes years later, suffer from Post

²⁰ IDEM, *Letter to Women*, no. 2.

²¹ IDEM, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 27.

Abortion Syndrome. In their grief and regret, women victims of abortion, can be led to experience God's infinite mercy and find grace, peace and healing.

Wives and mothers can support causes like *MaterCare International* which brings hope to mothers living with obstetric fistula, poor pre-natal and birthing care, support those who work with orphans in alleviating some of the hardships of families living with HIV/AIDS, and support work against all forms of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Informed comment, reinforced by authentic Catholic teachings in the texts already mentioned, assists wives and mothers to engage in advocacy at all levels to influence media outlets to be 'family friendly', and lawmakers to frame legislation that results in "the good of the whole human family". "Christians must be aware of their own vocation within the political community; it is for them to give an example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good".²²

Women have the opportunity to join associations that advance the Church's apostolic work and are in alliances that work cooperatively with like-minded organisations, particularly those that have representation at regional, state, national and/or international locations and agencies such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe. "Love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served".²³

Wives and mothers are responsible for making the love of Christ take flesh in their lives and in the lives of others and to recognise Him in the love of those they meet.

Here is just one instance of it: In my small country town live a young married couple named Teresa and Mark. The brief background to this true story is that some years ago Teresa's sister delivered Thomas

²² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 75

²³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 64.

Walter at full term. He had been diagnosed with anencephaly at 18 weeks gestation and surrounded by his loving family he lived for 17½ hours after birth. Four years later, Teresa and Mark's son Benedict, diagnosed with this same condition, lived for less than 24 hours, and 3 years later, their daughter Charlotte had the same diagnosis. Charlotte lived with her family for 5 days, and was given back to God on the 26th June, the exact date as was brother Benedict 3 years earlier.

Teresa tells her story in *Why carry a dying child? A mother's perspective*.²⁴ Here are some of her words: "Some people think we carried Benedict and Charlotte to term because we don't agree with abortion, because we are Catholic, or perhaps because our nephew was carried to term after a fatal diagnosis. While these factors probably all played a part in our immediate refusal to 'terminate', this is not what it is all about! It's about love! It's about my baby! It's not about some tragic, fatal medical condition – it's about my child.

We do not possess more strength than other people. It's not because we can cope where others wouldn't. There is no way to avoid the sad fact that she cannot live long after birth with this condition, but causing her to die earlier will not stop this happening. Causing her to die earlier will only take from us the beautiful experience of knowing and loving her [...].

The value of Thomas Walter, Benedict and Charlotte cannot be measured by the length of their lives. We don't apply this yardstick to adults, so why should we apply it to babies? A baby is not a possession, an accessory to acquire. A baby is a gift, a new entity, a precious, individual soul loved by God. We are created for a purpose. There is a reason for our being here. Even if that reason is unclear to us most of the

²⁴ T. STREKFUSS, "Why Carry a Dying Child? A Mother's Perspective", in: *Women's Voice*, Official Newsletter, World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, December 2004, no. 7, 42.

time, we are constantly affecting other people in our families, communities, etc. Who knows what purpose can be fulfilled in nine months and one day? I don't know, but God does.

I do know that Benedict left a lasting impression on our family. He made us slow down, savour life and treasure our other children even more. He made us realise that we cannot control or predict what will happen in the future. He made us rely on God. And how often are we given the opportunity to really give another person true unconditional love, love that truly expects no return? It was a blessing to experience that kind of pure love!

So, don't pity us for carrying a child we know will die, carrying this beautiful person is an honour. Grieve for the fact that our baby will die. We wouldn't wish away the time we had with Benedict, and also this time we are experiencing with Charlotte, just to save us the pain of losing them.... Someone asked us after Benedict died, "Was it worth it?" Oh yes! For the chance to hold him and see him and love him before letting him go? For the chance for our children to see that we would never stop loving them regardless of their imperfections? For the chance to give him everything we could? Oh yes!

Love your children and remember that they each have their own unique mission. Children are always and only a blessing from God - even if they don't stay very long".

Women – 'love with skin on' – regardless of the colour of that skin, be it gleaming jet, lily white, or any of the hues in between, whether that skin be young and smooth, freckled, gnarled, old and wrinkled, all have been given the privilege of 'entrustment' and the ensuing tasks of responsibility.

May wives and mothers, like Mary the Mother of Love, "treasure all these things" and "ponder them" in their hearts (cf. *Lk* 2: 19), and with the help of her intercession, be true guardians of spousal and maternal love, and give it away.

Witnesses of consecrated life

ENRICA ROSANNA, FMA*

THE *HUMANUM* IN THE STYLE OF VIRGINITY

What we know as consecrated life today has been from the beginning a “life” transformed by evangelical paradoxes, tested and testified. The Gospel as light and as practice, the desert and the ascent, compassion and cure, solitude and friendship, work and celebration, night and the splendour of contemplation, prayer and tears, the call of the poor: these are some of the paradoxes that pertain to a life of discipleship. It is through these that the consecrated life has learned from life, taking it in all its gravity, to become a place of discipleship: modelled after the way of life chosen by Christ.

Insight into the mystery of Christ, “born of woman” (*Gal* 4: 4), who became flesh and came to dwell among us (cf. *Jn* 1), and to follow in his footsteps, firmly establishes consecrated life on the humanity of Jesus. He gave voice to the interrelationship man-woman, the fullness of the *humanum*, by choosing the path of virginity in his life among the children of humanity.

One of the most forceful passages in the magisterium of John Paul II, in chapter 5 of the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, deals with the characteristics of Jesus’ human relations, the uni-dual understanding of the *humanum*, in the full dignity of the *imago Dei*, expressed in man and woman. Christ responded to women in a very simple way, and,

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considering the times he lived in, that was extraordinary. He showed great transparency and depth, and was totally natural.

Jesus' humanity is not a "false" humanity, nor is it an instrument for the management of salvation. Jesus is the role model for our humanity and for the man-woman relationship, and he does so with the forceful sign of virginity. The Son of God did not chose the option of married life. He chose to live the fullness of humanity in virginity, a powerful innovation for his contemporaries. John the Evangelist recalls that the disciples themselves "were astonished that he was speaking with a woman" (*Jn* 4: 27). John Paul II emphasised that "by speaking and acting in this way, Jesus made it clear that 'the mysteries of the Kingdom' were known to him in every detail. He also 'knew what was in man' (*Jn* 2: 25), in his innermost being, in his 'heart'. He was a witness of God's eternal plan for the human being, created in his own image and likeness as man and woman".¹

Consecrated life, in expressing this *evangelica vivendi forma*, lives out a charism that enables vivid comprehension of the human mystery and a wholehearted welcome of its expression. In particular, a woman who is consecrated can become a delicate and serene presence that penetrates and assumes the present in all its values, vigilant to the changing times.

An encounter with Our Lord Jesus Christ is something that points towards the light (*Is* 9: 1) and that strengthens the heart, an invitation that opens the horizon of the future in the generosity of the present. Women respond to this with a special thrust that is unique and remarkable. If we look for a reason for this generosity we shall find it in their identity of receptive motherhood, in their femininity that is welcoming and capable of generating life, and in their charity that is active and foresighted. In a word, in their genius.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 12.

That is why the Church considers the richness of the female identity and the diversity of ways in which their genius develops to be an expression of the power of the Spirit.

“By virtue of their dedication lived in fullness and in joy, consecrated women are called in a very special way to be signs of God’s tender love towards the human race and to be special witnesses to the mystery of the Church, Virgin, Bride and Mother. This mission of theirs was noted by the Synod, in which many consecrated women participated and made their voices heard. Those voices were listened to and appreciated. It is also due to their contribution that useful directions for the Church’s life and her evangelizing mission have emerged. Certainly, the validity of many assertions relating to the position of women in different sectors of society and of the Church cannot be denied. It is equally important to point out that women’s new self-awareness also helps men to reconsider their way of looking at things, the way they understand themselves, where they place themselves in history and how they interpret it, and the way they organize social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial life”.²

How many women have followed Christ and left signs in their wake of exemplary discipleship? In the way of minorities and outcasts, consecrated women have been face to face with history throughout the centuries as they developed the new and unexplored, living among humanity as fellow travellers. Examples are countless: Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Maria Domenica Mazzarello, Maddalena di Canossa, and so many others who adorn the most beautiful pages of the family album of religious women.

² IDEM, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, no. 57.

A DIPTYCH OF GREAT WOMEN

I would have liked to take this occasion to recount the lives of these women and so many others who are less well known but equally splendid, but time is the enemy. So I shall simply present a diptych in broad strokes, and speak of two women: Angela Merici, whose profile is still under study and is of much interest as a pioneering example of spirituality in the period between the late Middle Ages and pre-Tridentine Catholicism; and Luigia Tincani, who lived in the mid-twentieth century, a time rich in contrasting cultural ferment, and who was able to develop her feminine genius with the Gospel, in a very original form of consecrated life that, like Angela Merici, would call a large number of women to discipleship of Christ in the Church.

Angela Merici was born in Desenzano del Garda in Italy around 1474, and she died in Brescia in 1540. She gave witness through a profound and original religious experience, referred to in most studies on the Catholic Reform as charitable service aimed at religious education, the protection of poor women and assistance in the hospitals.

The sources, on the other hand, show us an example of an experience of women's consecration that opened up new paths in the role and mission of women and their religious and historical significance. Just like other women mystics in the late Middle Ages, like Angela da Foligno and Catherine of Siena, Angela Merici was considered to be a "living saint", due to her mystical contemplation, her theological wisdom, her distinctly human gifts, and her participation in civil life – this was the sixteenth century – in which her role was one of a womanly presence that was socially proactive. Angela's originality and genius are seen above all in the foundation of the Company of Saint Ursula in 1535, so that she could put her theology into practice by translating her experience and spiritual ideas into a specific model of religious life for women – this putting-into-practice reflecting the intellectual role and mission of women.

In particular, the whole organisation of the Company of Saint Ursula is a rare case of an association completely composed of and managed by women. In a society in which women should choose between marriage and the convent, the Ursulines were an anomaly. The model of religious life it offered gave women independence both at the spiritual and social levels. It opened the way for a free and demanding spirit and, at the same time, an opportunity for social visibility through an active role in the community. This was lived out as a means of witnessing to the Gospel.

The Company proposed an alternative form of consecration to that of monasticism. They lived in their own houses, but were joined in bonds of “evangelical-spiritual Charity” that were really remarkable. The Company, managed “from below”, was democratic and meritocratic and its members were considered to be equal citizens. Their way of life was absolutely innovative in that it was individual, interior, intensely evangelical, and also democratic and free of institutional elements. The role of women in managing this society is really extraordinary, especially since it was invented by a consecrated woman in the sixteenth century.

What perhaps strikes us most on reading the rule written by Angela, is the absence of the category of “power” and the emphasis given to the development of the person as a “human being”, even though it is within the framework of a transcendent purpose of existence. Merician religious thought, expressed clearly and straightforwardly, gives a profound anthropological-theological synthesis of the *humanum*, particularly of the female. It is evident here that the relation with the transcendent leaves its mark on the human, but it never debases it. On the contrary, it is the basis of a model of relationship with God, explicitly created by a woman for other women, with the aim of promoting their identity, role and mission in the world. Angela Merici’s rule shows us, for example, how consecrated women conceived their relationship with the transcendent and with society, in an

admirable balance between the two terms, and it shows a vibrant relationship between active life and mystical experience. Likewise, there is wonderful equilibrium between their awareness of their religious identity and the institutional dimension of religion.

In Angela Merici's writings the idea of spiritual process is particularly fascinating. It is a process of free nature that a consecrated woman "wants" to follow and does not "have to" follow (in the *Rule*, written by her, the word "want" is always used, and only three times can we find the word "must").

The interior dimension of the feminine therefore determines the features of personality (humble, friendly, humane, good, simple) and actions (to console, open one's heart, appreciate, support, help, advise, comfort, encourage, spur on, love, act with clarity and friendliness, uplift, correct with love, not to judge, act promptly, be an example, reprimand, contradict with dexterity and reverence) that Angela defined as pertaining to women.

Angela Merici's case is therefore emblematic. It shows modernity the portrayal that a woman can give to her own subjectivity in the religious sphere and to her active role, not only missionary, but primarily cultural-social-metaphysical, being aware of a balanced and expressed anthropology with *mulieris dignitate*.³

Luigia Tincani was born in Chieti, Italy, on 25 March 1889 and died in Rome on 31 May 1976. In current studies she is described as a worthy representative of the impressive Catholic Movement that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century in the footsteps of so many saintly people. They worked in the social sphere and in contemplation, and it continued into the twentieth century with their work of reform and renewal for the sake of the Church, the lay faithful and the transmission of Christian principles at every social level. Luigia Tincani was not a soli-

³ Cf. A. MERICI, "Regula, Ricordi e Testamento", in: M. GUERRINI, *La Compagnia di S. Orsola*, Milano 2003.

tary person. She conceived and proposed an original model of life for women, founded on an effective and radical religious consecration.

It was a model connected to an indispensable requirement for and experience of life in common, but that was practicable in the world, in society, without the usual religious habit and with a very precise aim: service in the field of culture and schools, primarily in public schools. An interesting book that contains her Foundational Letters, gives previously unpublished testimonies about the originality of the project and the spiritual and cultural maturity of those who carried it out during the period 1917 to 1924. It had its roots in Dominican spirituality drawn from its insertion in the Third Order; from experience of educational problems, intellectual training and moral and religious difficulties that they found among many young university students; from contact with the first women's Catholic organisations that gathered young graduates and university students together in groups; and finally, but in a certain sense as the basic condition, it was from the culture and humanism experienced in her family that Tincani's wonderful intuition was born. It was an ideal of religious life that did not come simply by belonging to the spiritual patrimony of the Dominican Order, but it was a special consecration that joined together a personal path towards Christian perfection, communion of religious life and service to the poor through the apostolate of culture. Luigia Tincani wrote that the Congregation of Religious gave their consent "presenting no difficulties or objections to our proposals to dedicate ourselves to teaching in the public schools, to our decision not to be distinguished externally from the rest of the faithful, [...] and also to be prepared to work in isolation in dedicating ourselves to the work of apostolate in education or Catholic Action. The primary duty is in school and in study. The rest is done if possible and if obedience so decrees. However, especially at the beginning, this could easily be to the detriment of schools and of our culture".⁴

⁴ L. TINCANI, *Lettere di Fondazione*, Roma 2007, 43.

She wrote in a letter of 6 August 1921: “ We cannot deviate towards tasks that are being satisfied by other religious congregations. The schools are the reason for which the union was born, among many others, and that for which it has the right and the duty to live, because no other religious congregation tends to prepare its members specifically for this purpose. Schools and public schools, study and culture, the higher we can go, true intellectual and scientific work; we are very far from that, but this is where we should aim by working consistently because this is what determines our religious family [...]. The ideal formats that we should look at are Contardo Ferrini and Giuseppe Toniolo. The books in which our ideal of life is somewhat described are, for example, *Les Sources del Gratry* and particularly *La vie intellectuelle del Padre Sertillanges*”.⁵

Pius XI would also give the new foundation the name Union of Saint Catherine of Siena Missionaries for Schools: “ I have had an audience! What immense joy, what a great consolation. How well he understood us, and how interested he was in us, and he really wants us to be as we are, Missionaries for Schools ”, Luigia Tincani wrote to Ermelinda Rigoni.⁶

The genius of woman is to dare to go to places where others would be intimidated: to join culture and the Gospel together in close alliance in a life consecrated for that mission. Luigia Tincani identified a fascinating spiritual process from which I would like to briefly outline the programme that is strongly and gently feminine, recounted in words of fervour.

“ The first seed of my vocation occurred in Bologna. It was already clear, definite and I had it in my heart. When I realised who God was, I could only give myself to Him. [...] I would have gone to a cloister through obedience because I understood the value of prayer and repa-

⁵ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

ration, but I also felt that the exercise of virtue in a convent was not enough for me. I saw how much needed to be done in the world. You could say that I was born in school. [...] I was passionate and full of desire. It seemed impossible to me to just look on at the awful things that were happening in society. I had to find a means of showing the way to those who did not know God ”.⁷

With these words, Luigia Tincani showed huge interior depth, without limits. Her words overturned all the mystic that was not Christian, just as they overturned the *cogito ergo sum*. But this overturning saves, as far as that is possible, the situation of modernity. It is enough to change the *cogito* into the passive *cogitor ergo sum*, I am thought of, I am thought of by God, and therefore I am. “When I understood who God was, I could only give myself to Him ”.⁸

In her experience of the Absolute, Luigia Tincani, discovered her vocation as a woman for the transcendent, and with equal clarity, the impossibility of compressing it into a preformatted design or of setting it out on paths already trodden. This is the historical newness of her charismatic intuition, perceived with such naturalness: “You could say that I was born in school ”.

There is no doubt about it, but the programme she put forward to her companions is tough, and at times almost severe, for souls prepared for total dedication to the religious life. Yet in her suggestions and spiritual direction that she offered to the sisters, we become aware of the feminine touch of a *humanum* that is integrated and clear, and that recognises the gradualness of the path of faith of the religious life. It is a constant invitation to serenity, without discouragement, a path towards beauty with which to fall in love, a path made up of the most complete, joyful and cordial sorority: “During those years when we lived solely with plans and hopes, they, with their trust, their virtue, their life of

⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*

apostolate in the schools and with their Dominican enthusiasm, gave me the certainty that it would be possible for generous souls to live out the new and ancient ideal of Dominic and Catherine in the apostolate and in education, *in noviter*".⁹

"We must travel together along a path that is arduous and magnificent. Look, I no longer doubt, my dear sister, that the Lord has really called you too to travel this path, and I would like to have words of light and fire to repeat with you the beauty and greatness that I see and feel and that sets fire to my soul".¹⁰

"On our common path towards the fullness of time of the children of God, all that I can do for my brothers and sisters is, in the last analysis, to be for them a living lesson in which they can read about an idea fulfilled that will be light and strength on their way. Education can be as intense as the true art and poetry of life. I cannot but offer them the coherence of my mind, heart, actions and words, as an artist offers the work in which she has put the vibrant surge of her art".¹¹

The life stories of these two women, humble and great, and so many other consecrated women who have enriched humanity with their presence and mission, bear eloquent witness to how the "feminine genius" in the touch of the Spirit can find fresh splendid lives to take part in the mission of the Son¹² and in this creation to fulfil God's work of art and to fulfil God's dream for humanity.

⁹ L. TINCANI, "Dopo venticinque anni", in: *Sequela Christi* III, 219-220.

¹⁰ IDEM, *Lettere di Fondazione*, op. cit., 57.

¹¹ IDEM, *Note di pedagogia generale*, Milano 1925, 103.

¹² IDEM, *Lettere di Fondazione*, op. cit., 57.

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