

# *MULIERIS DIGNITATEM* TWENTY YEARS LATER: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DOCUMENT AND CHALLENGES

*Sr. Prudence Allen, R.S.M.<sup>†</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

August 15, 2008, marked the twentieth anniversary of the promulgation of the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*.<sup>1</sup> This Article provides an overview of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, looking at some of the key principles Pope John Paul II articulates. This Article describes how the principles were innovative with respect to previous teaching about women, evaluates the principles in light of present developments in our American culture, and suggests some possible ways we might consider acting on these principles for a new evangelization. Reflections proceed chronologically and thematically through *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

This Article discusses the following themes: Part I, the truth about the human being; Part II, Mary, the Mother of God, as our pilgrim guide; Part III, *communio* in the Holy Trinity as analogous for *communio* of women and men; Part IV, the rupture within a person and among persons through sin; Part V, encountering Jesus Christ as enabling this rupture to be overcome; Part VI, the mandate to release each woman's genius in the face of evil for the good of all; Part VII, paradigm dimensions of women's vocations in the Church; Part VIII, complementarity through spousal bonds; and Part IX, plans of action through educating on the nature and dignity of women and through ransoming language.

---

<sup>†</sup> Sr. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., Ph.D., is a Professor, Department of Philosophy, at the St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver, Colorado.

1. Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* [*Apostolic Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women*] (1988) [hereinafter *Mulieris Dignitatem*].

## I. THE TRUTH ABOUT THE HUMAN BEING

In this meditation on the dignity and vocation of women, John Paul II returns to the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, promulgated in 1965.<sup>2</sup> An integral part of *Mulieris Dignitatem* comes from a famous passage in *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>3</sup> The passage states, "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."<sup>4</sup> How does Jesus do this? How does Jesus Christ reveal one to oneself, as this particular woman or man, at this particular time and place in his or her life? *Mulieris Dignitatem* helps answer this question.

This call to discover the greatness of the human being is in both *Gaudium et Spes* and *Mulieris Dignitatem*.<sup>5</sup> Compare those texts with the following observation from Cardinal Ratzinger:

Today there is a remarkable hatred among people for their own real greatness. Man sees himself as the enemy of life, of the balance of creation, as the great disturber of the peace of nature (which would be better off if he did not exist), as the creature that went wrong. His salvation and the salvation of the world would on this view consist of his disappearing, of his life and soul being taken back from him, of what is specifically human vanishing so that nature could return to its unconscious perfection in its own rhythm and with its own wisdom of dying and coming into being.<sup>6</sup>

The call to overcome this "remarkable hatred among people for their own greatness" brings a kind of new urgency to our reflections during this year, the twentieth anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*. Reflecting on this call is not simply an intellectual exercise; it is also a way of participating in the new evangelization of the Church and the

---

2. *Id.* ¶ 2 (citing Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World]* ¶ 22 (1965), reprinted in THE SIXTEEN DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II 513, 533 (Nat'l Catholic Welfare Conference trans., 1967) [hereinafter *Gaudium et Spes*]).

3. *See id.* ¶ 2 ("Christ fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear." (internal quotation marks omitted) (citing *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 2, ¶ 22)).

4. *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 2, ¶ 22.

5. *See id.* ¶¶ 12–22; *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶¶ 6–7, 29–30; *see also* CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ¶¶ 521, 618, 1701 (2d ed. 1997) (discussing the call to be like Christ, to suffer with him, and how Christ makes manifest man's "exalted vocation").

6. POPE BENEDICT XVI, THE YES OF JESUS CHRIST: SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE 74 (Robert Nowell trans., 2005) (1989).

world. This call to overcome self-hatred begins with the truth about the human being, about woman and about man. Each of us has been created with the possibility of eternal life in communion with God and the saints.<sup>7</sup> This is the true greatness of our unique personal being.

Pope John Paul II explores this truth at the beginning of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and he shows how it relates particularly to the dignity of women. John Paul II says that understanding woman's dignity and vocation requires us to

understand[] 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. 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.<sup>8</sup>

This is an issue the Pope addresses throughout the letter, especially in chapter three concerning *communio* between a man and a woman as analogous to the Trinity.<sup>9</sup> The Pope then identifies the two theological roots of the great dignity of a woman and a man. First, "every man and woman . . . [has] a fundamental inheritance," namely, being created "in the image of God . . . ; male and female he created them."<sup>10</sup> Second, Jesus Christ came to earth and assumed our human nature, and in our Baptism he adopted us into his relation with the Father, sharing his inheritance of eternal life with the Divine Communion of Persons.<sup>11</sup> Our great dignity is thus rooted theologically in our creation in the image and likeness of God and our Redemption through the Son, the Eternal Word made flesh.

In *Fides et Ratio*, the 1998 encyclical letter *On The Relationship Between Faith and Reason*, Pope John Paul II says, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth . . ." <sup>12</sup> This leads us to consider how our great dignity as human beings can be defended by reason, as well as by

---

7. See CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, *supra* note 5, ¶¶ 27–30, 954–62.

8. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 1.

9. See *id.* ¶¶ 6–8.

10. *Id.* ¶ 2 (emphasis omitted) (internal quotation marks omitted) (quoting *Genesis* 1:27).

11. See CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, *supra* note 5, ¶¶ 460–49, 1265.

12. Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* [Encyclical Letter on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason] pmb. (1998).

faith. In an earlier essay, Karol Wojtyla offers evidence for the dignity of the human person based on observation and human reason:

The human being holds a position superior to the whole of nature and stands above everything else in the visible world. This conviction is rooted in experience. . . . Our distinctiveness and superiority as human beings in relation to other creatures is constantly verified by each one of us, regardless of how inferior we might feel because of our physical or spiritual deficiencies. In the latter case, the superiority and natural dignity of the person is confirmed as though by contrast. It is also verified by the whole of humanity in its ongoing experience: in the experience of history, culture, technology, creativity, and production. The effects of human activity in various communities testify to this dignity.<sup>13</sup>

Karol Wojtyla understood this philosophical source of human dignity as intimately connected to the truth about the human person. In his own words:

Human beings do not live for the sake of technology, civilization, or even culture; they live by means of these things, always preserving their own purpose. This purpose is intimately connected with truth, because the human being is a rational being, and also with the good, because the good is the proper object of free will.<sup>14</sup>

John Paul II's approach to the nature and dignity of woman is summarized in the following way. First, our nature is a *human* nature, as evidenced by faith in Revelation and by reason. Second, dignity flows from its supernatural origins, each one of us being created unique in the image and likeness of God, with the spiritual faculties of an intellect capable of knowing the truth and a will capable of freely choosing to act on the basis of this truth. Third, dignity is further elevated by the fact that Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior, assumed our *human* nature—not an angelic nature and not some other kind of nature, but our specific human nature. Finally, we observe the difference between our human nature and the nature of other living things by looking around and seeing that we are the only kind of living thing that keeps its own written history, creatively uses

---

13. KAROL WOJTYLA, *On the Dignity of the Human Person*, in PERSON AND COMMUNITY: SELECTED ESSAYS 177, 178 (Andrew N. Woznicki ed., Cathlich Theresa Sandok trans., Catholic Thought from Lublin No. 4, 1993).

14. *Id.* at 179.

advanced technology for its own purposes, and develops its own culture collectively and individually to the highest degree.<sup>15</sup> This is true of human beings in general. Now we will return to our study of *Mulieris Dignitatem* and ask how these characteristics of the dignity of the human person particularly relate to woman's identity.

## II. MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD, OUR PILGRIM GUIDE FOR DIALOGUE

In chapter two of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II unfolds a new depth of understanding of Mary's place in the Church and world, definitively revealed through what he calls "[t]he whole Annunciation dialogue."<sup>16</sup> In his words, "This event is clearly interpersonal in character: it is a dialogue."<sup>17</sup> Mary engaged her intellect first in the dialogue when she asked the angel Gabriel, "How can this be . . . ?"<sup>18</sup> Then, after hearing the angel's response that she would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, she freely chose with her will to accept this invitation for her sublime vocation.<sup>19</sup> John Paul II elaborates that "through her response of faith Mary exercises her free will and thus fully shares with her personal and feminine 'I' in the event of the Incarnation. . . . All of God's action in human history at all times respects the free will of the human 'I.'"<sup>20</sup> Mary's intellect and will are those very gifts she inherited by being created in the image of God.

John Paul II describes the personal dimension of the Annunciation event this way:

At the moment of the Annunciation, by responding with her "*fiat*," Mary conceived a man who was the Son of God, of one substance with the Father. Therefore she is truly the Mother of God, because motherhood concerns the whole person, not just the body, nor even just human "nature."<sup>21</sup>

---

15. See *id.* at 178–80.

16. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 5.

17. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

18. *Luke* 1:34 (Revised Standard, Catholic Edition).

19. See *id.* 1:35; *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 4.

20. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 4.

21. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

From the perspective of the nature and dignity of woman, he states that the model of Mary at the Annunciation “also signifies the fullness of the perfection of ‘what is characteristic of woman,’ of ‘what is feminine.’ Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women.”<sup>22</sup>

Pope John Paul II discusses the significance of dialogue further in two documents, *Ut Unum Sint* and *Vita Consecrata*.<sup>23</sup> In *Ut Unum Sint*, he writes:

The capacity for “dialogue” is rooted in the nature of the person and his dignity. . . . Dialogue is an indispensable step along the path toward human self-realization, the self-realization both of each individual and of every human community. Although the concept of “dialogue” might appear to give priority to the cognitive dimension (*dia-logos*), all dialogue implies a global, existential dimension. It involves the human subject in his or her entirety. . . .<sup>24</sup>

He concludes that “[d]ialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts.’”<sup>25</sup>

In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II connects this mission for dialogue to the vocation to consecrated life for the good of the Church:

Everything must be done in communion and dialogue with all other sectors of the Church. . . . The experience of recent years widely confirms that “dialogue is the new name of charity,” especially charity within the Church. Dialogue helps us to see the true implications of problems and allows them to be addressed with greater hope of success. The consecrated life, by the very fact that it promotes the value of fraternal life, provides a privileged experience of dialogue. It can therefore contribute to creating a climate of

---

22. *Id.* ¶ 5 (emphasis omitted).

23. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* [Encyclical Letter on Commitment to Ecumenism] (1995) [hereinafter *Ut Unum Sint*]; Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* [Apostolic Exhortation on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World] (1996) [hereinafter *Vita Consecrata*].

24. *Ut Unum Sint*, *supra* note 23, ¶ 28.

25. *Id.*; cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church] ¶ 13 (1964), reprinted in THE SIXTEEN DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II, *supra* note 2, at 107, 124 [hereinafter *Lumen Gentium*] (describing the sharing of gifts among the diverse parts of the Church); Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam* [Encyclical Letter on Paths of the Church] ¶ 64 (1964) [hereinafter *Ecclesiam Suam*] (“To this internal drive of charity . . . we will give the name of dialogue . . .”).

mutual acceptance in which the Church's various components, feeling that they are valued for what they are, come together in ecclesial communion in a more convinced manner, ready to undertake the great universal mission.<sup>26</sup>

Dialogue, as the new name for charity,<sup>27</sup> opens up a rich dynamic for those who are called to follow the Marian model of vocation. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II states, "The dignity of *every human being* and the vocation corresponding to that dignity find their definitive measure in *union with God*. Mary . . . is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation."<sup>28</sup>

This particular woman, Mary, serves as the guide for the vocation of every woman and every man. This is why John Paul II, just one year before *Mulieris Dignitatem*, described Mary as the Pilgrim Guide at the center of the Pilgrim Church.<sup>29</sup> Because Mary shared in the dignity and call of our human nature and lived the pilgrimage of her vocation before us, she can guide each of us on our pilgrimage individually and communally, just as she guided her friends in the early Church after the death and Resurrection of her Son.<sup>30</sup>

### III. COMMUNIO IN THE HOLY TRINITY ANALOGOUS FOR COMMUNIO OF WOMEN AND MEN

Pope John Paul II describes how interpersonal communion is analogous to the communion among the Divine Persons in the Holy Trinity. He states:

This "unity of the two," which is a sign of interpersonal communion, shows that the creation of man is also marked by a certain *likeness* to the divine communion ("*communio*"). This *likeness* is a quality of the personal being of both man and woman, and is also a call and a task.<sup>31</sup>

26. *Vita Consecrata*, *supra* note 23, ¶ 74 (emphasis omitted).

27. *Ecclesiam Suam*, *supra* note 25, ¶ 64 ("To this internal drive of charity which tends to become the external gift of charity we will give the name of dialogue . . .").

28. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 5 (first emphasis added).

29. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* [*Encyclical Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church*] ¶¶ 25–28 (1987) [hereinafter *Redemptoris Mater*].

30. *See id.*

31. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 7 (emphasis added and omitted).

John Paul II appears to be making a distinction between the *image* of God, which is found in each individual man and woman, created with an intellect and will, and the *likeness* of God, which is more clearly seen in a communion of human persons called to become a living sign of the *communio* among the Divine Persons. The word *communio* was developed during the Second Vatican Council, especially in the documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>32</sup> Karol Wojtyla, while he was Cardinal of Krakow, described communion in terms of self-gift:

Based on [the commandment of Christ to love others as Christ loved us], the catholicity of the Church manifests and explains itself through *communio*, that is to say community and social unity after the *likeness* of the community of persons which, as *Gaudium et Spes* tells us, can only be fully realized in “sincere self-giving.”<sup>33</sup>

At this point in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II draws attention to truths about woman in relation to man and in relation to God.<sup>34</sup> First, he describes the man-woman relation.<sup>35</sup> Second, he elaborates the essential characteristics of the analogy between the divine relations among the Persons of the Holy Trinity on one hand, and the human personal relations between women and men on the other.<sup>36</sup> Pope John Paul II introduces some important corrections to previous false understandings in both of these areas. Let us consider each area in turn.

While many have argued in the past that *Genesis* suggests a subordination or inequality of woman in relation to man,<sup>37</sup> Pope John Paul II emphasizes the fundamental equality and dignity of woman and man.<sup>38</sup> He states unequivocally, “[B]oth man and woman are human

32. See *Lumen Gentium*, *supra* note 25, ¶¶ 9, 13, 32–33, 49–51; *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 2, ¶ 50; see generally VATICAN II: RENEWAL WITHIN TRADITION 3–53, 147–83 (Matthew L. Lamb & Matthew Levering eds., 2008).

33. CARDINAL KAROL WOJTYLA, SOURCES OF RENEWAL: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL 135 (P.S. Falla trans., Harper & Row 1980) (1972) (emphasis added) (quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 2, ¶ 24). Notice the use of the word “likeness” in this context. *Id.*

34. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶¶ 6–8.

35. *Id.* ¶¶ 6–7.

36. *Id.* ¶¶ 7–8.

37. See, e.g., 1 SR. PRUDENCE ALLEN, R.S.M., THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN 222–24, 231 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ’g Co. 1997) (1985) (discussing St. Augustine’s belief that woman was created inferior to man).

38. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶¶ 6–7.

*beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image. . . . Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God.*"<sup>39</sup> Then to be sure that the reader gets the point, he adds, "The biblical text provides sufficient bases for recognizing the essential equality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity. From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them. *The woman is another 'I' in a common humanity.*"<sup>40</sup> Pope John Paul II's repeated statements about women and men as human beings, as persons, as sharing a common humanity defends the *first premise* of what I call an "integral gender complementarity," namely the fundamental equality of dignity and worth of the two complement beings.<sup>41</sup>

The *second premise* for integral gender complementarity is the identification of the significant differentiation of woman and man.<sup>42</sup> The *third premise* for integral gender complementarity is the synergistic effects of their union in interpersonal relation.<sup>43</sup> Returning to *Mulieris Dignitatem*, these two premises are clearly stated. Consider the following passage:

To be human means to be called to interpersonal communion. The text of Genesis 2:18–25 shows that marriage is the first and, in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call. But it is not the only one. The whole of human history unfolds within the context of this call. In this history, on the basis of the principle of mutually being "for" the other, in interpersonal "communion," there develops in humanity itself, in accordance with God's will, the integration of *what is "masculine" and what is "feminine."*<sup>44</sup>

Here we discover the introduction of the significant differentiation between what is masculine and what is feminine, and at the same time we see a "call" to interpersonal communion. Further, marriage is the first and most fundamental dimension of this call, but not the

---

39. *Id.* ¶ 6; see also JOHN PAUL II, *THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY* 43–44 (1997) [hereinafter *THEOLOGY OF THE BODY*]; MARY SHIVANANDAN, *CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF LOVE: A NEW VISION OF MARRIAGE IN THE LIGHT OF JOHN PAUL II'S ANTHROPOLOGY* 95–103 (Catholic Univ. of Am. Press 1999) (1999).

40. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 6 (footnote omitted).

41. See generally Sr. Prudence Allen, *Analogy, Law and the Workplace: Complementarity, Conscience and the Common Good*, 4 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 350, 359–61 (2007).

42. See *id.* at 361.

43. See *id.* at 360.

44. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 7.

only dimension. The Pope does not specify the essential characteristics that distinguish the masculine from the feminine, but he has introduced this distinction as significant at the same time that he states that interpersonal communion is vital to bring together what is masculine and what is feminine.<sup>45</sup>

Pope John Paul II directly applies this call to communion to woman and man in marriage:

The fact that man “created as man and woman” is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also 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, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life.<sup>46</sup>

Then, directly following the description of this likeness in the way a married couple is called to be a sign or mirror of the divine communion, the late Holy Father immediately rejects false ways that this analogy has been understood.<sup>47</sup> The key to his critique is to understand the divine *communio* as the *prime communion*, completely spiritual in its essential interpersonal relations, and the human *communio* as *derived* in its mixed spiritual-material relations. A root of error resides in those who consider the human *communio* as prime and try to project this model into the divine.

Instead, one must understand the eternally begetting of the Son, the Eternal Word, by God the Father as a total *spiritual* generation. There is nothing material in this “absolute model of all ‘generation.’”<sup>48</sup> Pope John Paul II summarizes it this way:

[I]n itself this “generating” has neither “masculine” nor “feminine” qualities. It is by nature totally divine. It is spiritual in the most perfect way, since “God is spirit” (Jn 4:24) and possesses no property typical of the body, neither “feminine” nor “masculine.” Thus even

---

45. *See id.*

46. *Id.*

47. *See id.*

48. *Id.* ¶ 8 (emphasis omitted).

“fatherhood” in God is completely divine and free of the “masculine” bodily characteristics proper to human fatherhood.<sup>49</sup>

John Paul II describes this difference by saying that the *likeness* between human generation and divine generation is less than the “*non-likeness*.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the analogy between human and divine generation is very limited. One *cannot* draw a strict likeness between an individual man and God the Father or a strict likeness between an individual woman and any particular member of the Divine Communion of Persons. The likeness can only be drawn between *the Divine Communion of Love (communio)* among the Divine Persons and *the human communion of love (communio)* between a husband and wife. These communions are synergetic or generating.

Thus every element of human generation which is proper to man, and every element which is proper to woman, namely human “*fatherhood*” and “*motherhood*,” bears within itself a likeness to, or analogy with the divine “generating” and with that “fatherhood” which in God is “totally different”—that is, completely spiritual and divine in essence; whereas in the human order, generation is proper to the “unity of the two”: both are “parents,” the man and the woman alike.<sup>51</sup>

Another clarification the late Holy Father makes about attributing fatherhood or motherhood to God, drawing upon examples from Scripture or human experience, is that one can say that God acts like a father or like a mother *in relation to* his created world.<sup>52</sup> Here the analogy in regard to what is called “the divine economy” is drawn from the human experience of fathers and mothers, while there is no attribution to God in regard to the inner dynamics of love among the Divine Persons themselves.<sup>53</sup> To give an example to demonstrate this difference, it is *not* correct to begin the Lord’s Prayer with the words “Our Mother, who are in Heaven,” because this is Jesus’ prayer as the Second Divine Person to his Father, the First Divine Person. Jesus adopts us by Baptism into that relation, so that his Father becomes our Father. It is appropriate, however, to pray in gratitude with

---

49. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

50. *Id.*

51. *Id.*

52. *See id.*; see also CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, *supra* note 5, ¶ 370.

53. CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, *supra* note 5, ¶ 258; see also *id.* ¶¶ 370, 2779.

St. Anselm and Julian of Norwich to Jesus Christ, who like a mother, died to give birth to us and who nourishes us through the Eucharist.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV. THE RUPTURE WITHIN A PERSON AND AMONG PERSONS THROUGH SIN

In chapter four of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II begins to elaborate on specific differences between women and men as a consequence of original sin. While in general all human beings are affected by the disorder of the passions, the dulling of intellect, and weakening of will, the late Pope suggests that the text of *Genesis* offers a clue to some gender-differentiated inheritances of original sin.<sup>55</sup> In an earlier text written in 1960 while still Cardinal of Krakow, we see a similar discussion.<sup>56</sup> Karol Wojtyla suggests that women tend to use men more out of sentimentality while men tend to use women out of sensuality.<sup>57</sup> He argues in this text that marriage provides the opportunity to transform the raw data of sentimentality or sensuality into mature spousal love.<sup>58</sup>

In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II focuses on the roots in *Genesis* of the sin condition in the modern world, especially as it impacts women:

[W]hen 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. But this threat is more serious for the woman, since 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

---

54. See St. Anselm, Prayer to St. Paul, in *THE PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS OF ST. ANSELM WITH THE PROSLOGION* 141, 153 (Benedicta Ward trans., 1973); 2:1 ALLEN, *supra* note 37, at 387, 411–28 (2002); see also *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*, *supra* note 5, ¶ 2779 (stating that paternal and maternal images influence our relationship with God); 1 ALLEN, *supra* note 37, at 262–70 (discussing St. Anselm’s notion of Christ as mother); Sr. Mary Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *Language and the Invitation to Conversion*, in *LANGUAGE AND FAITH* 93, 112, 117 (Anthony J. Mastroeni ed., 1997).

55. See *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶¶ 9–11.

56. KAROL WOJTYLA, *LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY* 109–14 (H.T. Willets trans., Ignatius Press 1993) (1960).

57. *Id.* In Pope John Paul II’s words, “It is pretty generally recognized that woman is ‘by nature’ more sentimental, and man more sensual.” *Id.* at 111.

58. See *id.* at 218.

*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."*<sup>59</sup>

Woman must work to overcome her tendency to possess those she loves, her inheritance from original sin captured in the phrase "your desire shall be for your husband."<sup>60</sup> As St. Edith Stein observes in her book *Essays on Women*, this tendency in a woman to want to possess those she loves can extend to her children as well.<sup>61</sup> Man must also work to overcome his specific inheritance of original sin. In Pope John Paul II's words from *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

The matrimonial union requires respect for and a perfecting of the true personal subjectivity of both of them. *The woman cannot become the "object" of "domination" and male "possession."* But the words of the biblical text directly concern original sin and its lasting consequences in man and woman.<sup>62</sup>

Pope John Paul II points out another challenge for women when attempting to work through the consequences of man's tendencies to dominate:

[E]ven the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words, "He shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16) must not under any condition lead to the "masculinization" of women. In the name of liberation from male "domination," women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine "originality."<sup>63</sup>

Pope John Paul II later develops two aspects of this discussion in his famous encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.<sup>64</sup> He begins with the following:

---

59. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 10.

60. *Id.*; *Genesis* 3:16 (Revised Standard, Catholic Edition).

61. See 2 EDITH STEIN, *ESSAYS ON WOMEN* 75, 257 (L. Gelber & Romaeus Leuven eds., Freda Mary Oben trans., ICS Publications 2d ed. rev. 1996) (1959).

62. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 10.

63. *Id.*

64. Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* [*Encyclical Letter on the Gospel of Life*] (1995) [hereinafter *Evangelium Vitae*].

In transforming culture so that it supports life, *women* occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on 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.<sup>65</sup>

Second, the Pope again attempts to protect the genuine uniqueness of woman’s identity, what he calls her “feminine ‘originality.’”<sup>66</sup> He warns her of the danger of assuming a particular characteristic of man’s identity, namely the tendency to dominate another person.<sup>67</sup> Following this line of thought, Mary Ann Glendon has addressed the modern tendency of women in developed countries to impose their positions on contraception, abortion, and women’s reproduction on third-world women as a kind of new colonialism.<sup>68</sup>

Despite these challenges, Pope John Paul II points out that both recognizing gender-specific inheritances of original sin and acting to purify them is part of our universal call to holiness. He states:

*The inheritance of sin* suggested by the words of the Bible—“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”—*can be conquered* only by following this path. The overcoming of this evil inheritance is, generation after generation, the task of every human being, whether woman or man.<sup>69</sup>

#### V. ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHRIST ENABLES THIS RUPTURE TO BE OVERCOME

In paragraph eleven, Pope John Paul II presents the main principle of the letter: “In Christ the mutual opposition between man and woman—which is the inheritance of original sin—is essentially overcome.”<sup>70</sup> He further amplifies this fundamental principle by quoting St. Paul’s words to the Galatians that in Jesus Christ “there is

---

65. *Id.* ¶ 99.

66. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 10.

67. *Evangelium Vitae*, *supra* note 64, ¶ 99.

68. See MARY ANN GLENDON, *What Happened at Beijing*, in TRADITIONS IN TURMOIL 301, 305–10 (2006).

69. See *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 10.

70. *Id.* ¶ 11.

neither male nor female . . . [f]or you are all one in Jesus Christ."<sup>71</sup> He goes on, "These words concern that original 'unity of the two' which is linked with the creation of the human being as male and female, made in the image and likeness of God, and based on the model of that most perfect communion of Persons which is God himself."<sup>72</sup>

Jesus Christ overcomes the inheritance of original sin through becoming man with the cooperation of Mary. In the late Pope's words, "At the beginning of the New Covenant, . . . there is a woman: the Virgin of Nazareth."<sup>73</sup> That is why he adds the further reflection, "Mary is 'the new beginning' of the dignity and vocation of women, of each and every woman."<sup>74</sup> Further he states, "In Mary, Eve discovers the nature of the true dignity of woman, of feminine humanity. This discovery must continually reach the heart of every woman and shape her vocation and her life."<sup>75</sup>

Then, after stating these principles about the recovery from sin and fulfilling one's vocation as a woman, *Mulieris Dignitatem* offers example after example of how Jesus Christ, when he walked upon the earth, revealed to each woman he met who she was and who she was called to be.<sup>76</sup> Jesus did this by first entering "into the concrete and historical situation of women, a situation which is weighed down by the inheritance of sin"—such as in his encounter with the woman accused of adultery and the men who were about to stone her.<sup>77</sup> In Jesus' encounter with her and by his words, he awakens in the woman and all the men present a consciousness of their own sin; then, looking toward the future, he tells her not to sin again.<sup>78</sup> John Paul II brings the story of this encounter up to date when he adds, "A woman is left alone, exposed to public opinion with 'her sin,' while behind 'her' sin there lurks a man—a sinner, guilty 'of the other's sin,' indeed equally responsible for it. And yet his sin escapes notice, it is passed over in silence . . .!"<sup>79</sup> Jesus contrasts this attitude of rejection with the original call to give oneself to the other: "The man was also entrusted by the Creator to the woman—they were entrusted to each

---

71. *Id.* (emphasis omitted) (internal quotation marks omitted) (quoting *Galatians* 3:28).

72. *Id.*

73. *Id.*

74. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

75. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

76. *Id.* ¶¶ 12–14.

77. *Id.* ¶¶ 13–14 (emphasis omitted); see *John* 8:3–11.

78. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶¶ 13–14; *John* 8:3–11.

79. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 14.

other as persons made in the image and likeness of God himself.”<sup>80</sup> After this first phase of encounter with Jesus Christ and the discovery of one’s own sinfulness in relation to those persons whom God has entrusted to oneself, Pope John Paul II describes the effect of this encounter:

*Christ’s way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women. Consequently, the women who are close to Christ discover themselves in the truth which he “teaches” and “does,” even when this truth concerns their “sinfulness.” They feel “liberated” by this truth, restored to themselves: they feel loved with “eternal love,” with a love which finds direct expression in Christ himself. In Christ’s sphere of action their position is transformed.*<sup>81</sup>

The Samaritan woman at the well, after her lengthy discussion with Jesus about her life, runs to tell those who live in the village to come and meet him and see for themselves.<sup>82</sup> Following a dialogue with Martha about the meaning of his Resurrection, a “conversation [that] is one of the most important in the Gospel,” Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.<sup>83</sup> In many other encounters recaptured in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Jesus defended women who were criticized or devalued by the men around them, referring directly to such painful situations of women as being an unwed mother, widow, or abandoned mother with children.<sup>84</sup> In later documents, Pope John Paul II further elaborates on ways women are harmed by individual sin and social sin structures.<sup>85</sup>

---

80. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

81. *Id.* ¶ 15.

82. *John* 4:5–30; *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 15.

83. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 15; *John* 11:17–27, 38–44.

84. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 13.

85. Topics John Paul discussed include discrimination against women who chose to be wives and mothers, discrimination against girls in education, violence against women especially in the underground trade and enslavement of women, and the exploitation of women’s bodies. See, e.g., *Evangelium Vitae*, *supra* note 64, ¶ 99 (rejecting “all discrimination, violence and exploitation” of or against women); Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Women* ¶¶ 4–5 (1995), *reprinted in* POPE JOHN PAUL II ON THE GENIUS OF WOMEN 45, 49–50 (Comm. On Women in Soc’y & in the Church, U.S. Catholic Conference ed., 1997) [hereinafter *Letter to Women*] (expressing concern that women are not yet “fully integrated into social, political, and economic life,” especially those who have “chosen to be wives and mothers,” and condemning the sexual exploitation of women); Pope John Paul II, Remarks Welcoming Gertrude Mongella, Sec. Gen. of the 4th World Conference on Women, to the Vatican ¶¶ 6–7 (May 26, 1995), *reprinted in* POPE JOHN PAUL II ON THE GENIUS OF WOMEN, *supra*, at 37, 41–43 (stating that “[g]reater efforts are needed to eliminate

Returning to *Mulieris Dignitatem*, we see that after encountering oneself in relation to Jesus Christ, who reveals to a person who he or she really is, and after seeing the liberating effect the encounter with Jesus Christ had on several women in the Gospel, Jesus then sends some of these women forward in their vocation to serve in a specified way. To Mary Magdalene, who was “the first to meet the Risen Christ,”<sup>86</sup> he said, “[G]o to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.”<sup>87</sup> Then John Paul II observed, “Hence she came to be called ‘the apostle of the Apostles.’”<sup>88</sup>

Filling in some of the dynamics of this vocation, Pope John Paul II adds the following reflection: “Every vocation has a profoundly personal and prophetic meaning. In ‘vocation’ understood in this way, what is personally feminine reaches a new dimension: the dimension of the ‘mighty works of God,’ of which the woman becomes the living subject and an irreplaceable witness.”<sup>89</sup> With this orientation to vocation in general, *Mulieris Dignitatem* then begins to examine the internal structure of women’s specific vocations in the Church.

#### VI. MANDATE TO RELEASE EACH WOMAN’S GENIUS IN THE FACE OF EVIL FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS

The final point to consider with respect to the nature and dignity of woman is Pope John Paul II’s innovative discussion in chapter eight, what he introduces as “that ‘genius’ which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every

---

discrimination against women in areas that include education, health care, and employment,” and condemning the sexual exploitation of women and children); see also Sr. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *Philosophy of Relation in John Paul II’s New Feminism*, in *WOMEN IN CHRIST: TOWARD A NEW FEMINISM* 67, 89–90 (Michele M. Schumacher ed., Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ’g Co. 2004) (2003) (discussing similarities and differences in Pope John Paul II’s identification of discrimination, violence, and exploitation of women as compared with traditional feminism).

Tragically, a new form of violence against females done by women themselves has emerged: the so-called “Global War Against Baby Girls,” which stems from “the fateful collision between overweening son preference, the use of rapidly spreading prenatal sex determination technology for gender-based abortion, and the low or dramatically declining fertility levels.” Nicholas Eberstadt, *The Global War Against Baby Girls: An Update*, in *THE CHURCH, MARRIAGE, & THE FAMILY* 341, 362 (Kenneth D. Whitehead ed., 2007).

86. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 16.

87. *Id.* (internal quotation marks omitted) (quoting *John* 20:17).

88. *Id.*

89. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

circumstance: because they are human!—and because ‘the greatest of these is love’ (cf. 1 Cor 13:13).<sup>90</sup> He also refers to these qualities as signs of “the feminine genius,” and he uses the word “feminine” uniquely to describe a woman’s way of acting in the world.<sup>91</sup> Later, in his 1995 *Letter to Women*, the Pope elaborates on the meaning of genius in woman:

[T]he Church has many reasons for hoping that the forthcoming United Nations Conference in Beijing *will bring out the full truth about 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 of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfill their deepest vocation. Perhaps more than men, women *acknowledge the person*, because they see persons with their hearts. They see them independently of various ideological or political systems. They see others in their greatness and limitations; they try to go out to them and *help them*.<sup>92</sup>

This unique approach to the feminine genius or to woman’s genius raises certain questions. For instance, “What about the genius of man?” The Church has yet to articulate an answer to this question, but some hints may be found in different documents about St. Joseph, namely *Guardian of the Redeemer* and *On Human Work*.<sup>93</sup> There appears to be a root ontological aspect of man’s identity in being beneficent (giving good gifts) and benevolent (willing good gifts), donating spiritually and materially for the good of those within his sphere of influence.<sup>94</sup> St. Joseph also teaches the more specific virtues of fatherhood by characteristically adopting, protecting, and providing.<sup>95</sup>

---

90. *Id.* ¶ 30.

91. *Id.* ¶ 31 (emphasis omitted) (internal quotation marks omitted).

92. *Letter to Women*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 12.

93. See Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos* [*Apostolic Exhortation on the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church*] (1989); Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* [*Encyclical Letter on the Human Work*] (1981).

94. See Paul C. Vitz & Daniel C. Vitz, *Priests and the Importance of Fatherhood*, *HOMILETIC & PASTORAL REV.*, Dec. 2008, at 16.

95. See Prudence Allen, *Freedom and the Fatherhood of Priests*, *HOMILETIC & PASTORAL REV.*, Jan. 2002, at 18.

A second question—“Does every woman automatically have the genius of woman?”—can be answered by simply looking around. It is not the case that every woman pays attention to the human person in her sphere of activity; it is also the case that some men seem to do this very well, like Pope John Paul II, for example. So what is he saying about the female root of a woman’s genius, and what is it exactly?

In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the late Pope identifies what seems to be an essential characteristic of the genius of a woman. She receives the human being entrusted to her, and she fosters the growth of that human being for whom she is responsible.<sup>96</sup> John Paul II says it this way: “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.”<sup>97</sup> He continues, “A woman is strong because of her awareness of this entrustment, strong because of the fact that God ‘entrusts the human being to her,’ always and in every way, even in the situations of social discrimination in which she may find herself.”<sup>98</sup> This kind of entrusting of a human being could be the discovery of being pregnant, the awareness of her responsibility toward her own children, or it could be toward the students entrusted to her if she is a teacher. It could be the people in her sphere of responsibility in an office if she is in business, or the patients entrusted to her if she is in a medical occupation, and so on. In those circumstances, the particular way a woman chooses to act reveals whether she has discovered her own genius or not. Some women act against this genius when they have an abortion or by becoming hardened in one way or another. This is because, as a human person, we have free will and intellect and can sadly choose to act against our nature and dignity.<sup>99</sup>

John Paul II is realistic when he describes the woman in *Revelation* 12:4 as representing the cosmic scale of woman’s identity.<sup>100</sup> She is standing before “the Evil One, the ‘father of lies[,]’ . . . [t]he ‘ancient serpent’ [who] wishes to devour ‘the child.’”<sup>101</sup> He argues that it is the struggle of each and every woman to decide whether she will say “yes” or “no” to God and his eternal plan for

---

96. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 30.

97. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

98. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

99. *See id.*

100. *See id.*

101. *Id.*

her.<sup>102</sup> He concludes by acknowledging that through the action of the Holy Spirit in the world, in this “[m]editating on the biblical mystery of the ‘woman,’ the Church prays that in this mystery all women may discover themselves and their ‘supreme vocation.’”<sup>103</sup>

Returning to the famous encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, we find John Paul II pleading with women to develop their genius for the good of society.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, he argues that it is crucial for culture that women do the necessary work in this area of their vocation:

Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health. This is the fundamental contribution which the Church and humanity expect from women. And it is the indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural change.<sup>105</sup>

#### VII. PARADIGM DIMENSIONS OF WOMEN’S VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

Pope John Paul II develops in chapter four of *Mulieris Dignitatem* the principle that the two paradigm vocations for women—marriage or consecrated virginity—involve marriage and motherhood in complementary ways. Sacramental marriage and biological motherhood “bring[] about—on the woman’s part—a special ‘gift of self,’ as an expression of that spousal love whereby the two are united to each other so closely that they become ‘one flesh.’”<sup>106</sup> In complement to this kind of marriage, consecrated women “give themselves to the divine Spouse, and this personal gift tends to union, which is properly spiritual in character. Through the Holy Spirit’s action a woman becomes ‘one spirit’ with Christ the Spouse.”<sup>107</sup>

102. *Id.*

103. *Id.* ¶ 31.

104. *Evangelium Vitae*, *supra* note 64, ¶ 99.

105. *Id.*

106. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 18. For a thorough discussion of this principle of spiritual marriage and essential components of religious life, see Sr. Paula Jean Miller, F.S.E., *The Spousal Bond*, in *THE FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE: REVISITING THE VISION 47* (Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious ed., 2009).

107. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 20; *cf.* 1 *Corinthians* 6:17 (“But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”).

At the same time, the late Pope differentiates these two complementary bonds of marriage, using what appears to be material criteria and spiritual criteria, and insists that a woman's motherhood in sacramental marriage is spiritual as well as physical.<sup>108</sup> His argument in defense of this point bears repeating. Even though a woman's psychophysical structure is naturally oriented toward motherhood, a restricted biophysiological interpretation of woman and of motherhood would be a restricted understanding of her identity.<sup>109</sup> "Motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift" of self.<sup>110</sup>

In a similar way, Pope John Paul II points out that the spiritual marriage of the consecrated woman often manifests itself in various material situations. In his words, "[M]otherhood 'according to the Spirit' . . . can express itself as concern for people, especially the most needy: the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned and, in general, people on the margins of society."<sup>111</sup>

He identifies a key part of the *ethos* of all women as they live spousal love, namely that it "always involves a special readiness to be poured out for the sake of those who come within one's range of activity."<sup>112</sup> When we ask where John Paul II finds the root of this characteristic of women, we are led to his perceptive views about how a woman's body predisposes her, but does not biologically determine her, toward conception, pregnancy, and giving birth. While in *Mulieris Dignitatem* the late Pope simply mentions this root of woman's disposition to be poured out for the sake of those who come within our range of activity, in *Love and Responsibility*, a book he wrote as Karol Wojtyla, this root is made a little more precise.<sup>113</sup> He suggests that because each woman usually from the time of her puberty until her menopause ovulates, her body disposes her to receive new life these many times, even if she never gets pregnant.<sup>114</sup> This gift of repeated ovulations differentiates her from a man. Now, of course, a woman with free will can choose to suppress this gift and thus cut herself off from this disposition through some forms of

---

108. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 18.

109. *Id.*

110. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

111. *Id.* ¶ 21 (emphasis omitted).

112. *Id.*

113. WOJTYLA, *supra* note 56, at 106–07.

114. *Id.* at 279–83.

artificial contraception.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, if she becomes conscious of her time of ovulation by studying one of the many forms of natural family planning, she can also use this knowledge to help her conceive a child.

In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II observes further that when a woman does become pregnant:

[If she] accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb[, then a] unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings—not only towards her own child, but every human being—which profoundly marks the woman’s personality. It is commonly thought that *women* are more capable than men of paying attention *to another person*, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. 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*.<sup>116</sup>

This well-known and often controversial passage lays the foundation for what will become the new impetus for Pope John Paul II’s genius for women, namely her way of paying attention to the whole person in her sphere of activity, in all circumstances.

Before a more in-depth discussion can take place of what is meant by the genius of women, two further aspects of John Paul II’s description of the two paradigm vocations of women need to be addressed. What about the single woman who is not married? And what about a consecrated man?

It is important to keep in mind that the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* specifically stated the principle that is now summarized as “the universal call to holiness.”<sup>117</sup> This means that every baptized person, man or woman, is called to become a saint, regardless of whether they are married, consecrated, or single.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, Pope John Paul II clarifies that there is a difference between a path of spiritual marriage and of remaining single:

115. See Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* [Encyclical Letter on the Regulation of Birth] ¶¶ 13–14 (1968). For an exceptional discussion of this topic, see Janet E. Smith, *Contraception: Why Not?*, Address to the Catholic Physicians Guild (May 1994), <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/sexuality/se0002.html>.

116. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 18.

117. *Lumen Gentium*, *supra* note 25, ¶¶ 39–42.

118. *Id.* ¶¶ 40–42.

"[Consecrated virginity] cannot be compared to remaining simply unmarried or single, because virginity is not restricted to a mere 'no,' but contains a profound 'yes' in the spousal order: the gift of self for love in a total and undivided manner."<sup>119</sup> He views the consecrated woman as the analogous paradigm for a consecrated man as well:

One cannot correctly understand . . . a woman's consecration in virginity . . . without referring to spousal love. It is through this kind of love that a person becomes a gift for the other. Moreover, a man's consecration in priestly celibacy or in the religious state is to be understood analogously.<sup>120</sup>

#### VIII. COMPLEMENTARITY THROUGH SPOUSAL BONDS

In chapter seven of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II opens up a radically new dimension of sacramental marriage with great implications for the nature and dignity of women. For many generations before this, a woman's subordination to her husband was often described as her punishment because of Eve's sin, namely, that because woman misused her free will in the Garden of Eden, God placed her under the authority of a man, her husband.<sup>121</sup> Instead, according to Pope John Paul II, a man and a woman are called to "mutual self-giving [that] is not distorted either by the desire of the man to become the 'master' of his wife ('he shall rule over you') or by the woman remaining closed within her own instincts ('your desire shall be for your husband,' Gen 3:16)."<sup>122</sup>

Pope John Paul II goes on to introduce what he calls "The Gospel 'Innovation,'" based on *Ephesians* 5:21, that in marriage there is to be "a new way: as a 'mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ.'"<sup>123</sup> He differentiates between the relation of husband and wife and the analogous relation of Christ and the Church discussed in *Ephesians*: "[W]hereas 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

119. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 20.

120. *Id.* (emphasis omitted) (footnote omitted).

121. See, e.g., 1 ALLEN, *supra* note 37, at 231 (discussing St. Augustine's view that the husband was made the master of his wife because of Eve's sin).

122. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 18.

123. *Id.* ¶ 24 (emphasis omitted); cf. *Ephesians* 5:21–33.

mutual."<sup>124</sup> He adds, "In relation to the 'old' this is evidently something 'new': it is an innovation of the Gospel."<sup>125</sup>

To be sure the reader understands how significant this innovation of the Gospel is, Pope John Paul II repeats it two more times, each time increasing its urgency. First,

The "innovation" of Christ is a fact: it constitutes the unambiguous content of the evangelical message and is the result of the Redemption. However, 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, behavior and customs. This is a call which from that time onwards does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew.<sup>126</sup>

Second, commenting previously why this innovation is so important for a woman's nature and dignity, the Holy Father remarks, "In this love there is a fundamental *affirmation of the woman* as a person. This affirmation makes it possible for the female personality to develop fully and be enriched."<sup>127</sup> Before this innovation, women were often thought of by philosophers and theologians to be subject to men because of a weakness of their nature.<sup>128</sup> But Pope John Paul II sets all those previous claims to rest with his definitive view: "But *the challenge presented by the 'ethos' of the Redemption* is clear and definitive. All the reasons in favor of the 'subjection' of woman to man in marriage must be understood in the sense of a 'mutual subjection' of both 'out of reverence for Christ.'"<sup>129</sup>

The spousal bond of husband and wife becomes a living sign for other vocations in the Church.<sup>130</sup> As a living sign of the love between the Bridegroom and Bride, it communicates to everyone the love that God revealed through Hosea, God's faithful love for his people Israel, and the love of the Son Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, for his Bride, the Church.<sup>131</sup> The term "Bride" in this context has always been a

---

124. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 24.

125. *Id.*

126. *Id.*

127. *Id.*

128. *See, e.g.*, 1 ALLEN, *supra* note 37, at 231; 2:1 *id.* at 99–109 (2002).

129. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 24.

130. *See id.* ¶ 25.

131. *See id.* ¶¶ 23–25, 27.

collective term including men, women, and children, but the term “Bridegroom” represents an individual Divine Person. In the words of the late Pope, “In the Church every human being—male and female—is the ‘Bride,’ in that he or she accepts the gift of the love of Christ the Redeemer, and seeks to respond to it with the gift of his or her own person.”<sup>132</sup>

The prime living sign of this response of the collective bride is a consecrated woman virgin, and then, by analogy, religious women and men in general. In a similar way, the ordained priest is a living sign of the Bridegroom, and Pope John Paul II describes the Eucharist as “the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride . . . [that] makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ.”<sup>133</sup> Consequently, Pope John Paul II concludes that “the redemptive act of Christ the Bridegroom towards the Church the Bride . . . is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the Eucharist, in which the priest acts ‘*in persona Christi*,’ is performed by a man.”<sup>134</sup>

To summarize, the spousal dimension of vocations to sacramental marriage, consecrated virginity, and priesthood has been revealed through faith as living signs of the spousal dimension of reality. These complementary vocations serve as living signs to one another of different aspects of this reality. Thus, the married couple acts as a living sign of the love between God and His People, between Christ and the Church; the consecrated woman as a living sign of the response of human love to Divine Love; and the priest as the living sign of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, who loves first with his saving love.<sup>135</sup>

## IX. PLANS OF ACTION

### A. *Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women: ENDOW*

A first plan of action is to focus on educating women so that they can come to discover the great gift of their nature, their dignity, and vocation. How can women come to know what the Church has been

---

132. *Id.* ¶ 25.

133. *Id.* ¶ 26 (emphasis omitted).

134. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

135. See generally Sr. Mary Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *Catholic Marriage and Feminism, in THE CHURCH, MARRIAGE, & THE FAMILY* 95 (Kenneth D. Whitehead ed., 2007) (providing a more detailed development of these complementary vocations to marriage).

teaching since 1988 about the call to discover and develop a unique feminine genius for the good of the Church and the world? Some recent developments among lay women's organizations have begun to address this question.<sup>136</sup> While there are several women's organizations focusing on educating women on what the Church teaches about their nature and dignity, the organization with which I am most familiar is called ENDOW, an acronym for Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women according to the new feminism of John Paul II.<sup>137</sup>

ENDOW began in Denver about six years ago and is now holding classes in over sixty-six dioceses, two countries, and thirty-six states, always with the written permission of the local ordinary.<sup>138</sup> It is an ecclesial organization, whose board reports annually to the Council for the Laity.<sup>139</sup> It is supported by the cooperative work of women and men from many different spiritualities in the Church and drawn from the two wings of women's vocations, lay and consecrated religious.<sup>140</sup> ENDOW aims to educate "the woman in the pew," meaning any woman who wants to learn what the Catholic Church actually teaches about women's nature, dignity, and vocation.<sup>141</sup> ENDOW provides study guides and facilitator training on particular documents. Among them are study guides on John Paul II's *Letter to Women*, the apostolic letter *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, his encyclical *Mother of the Redeemer*, and his apostolic letter *On the Christian Meaning of Suffering*.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, there are studies on St. Thomas Aquinas, a study entitled *Discovering your Dignity: A Woman's Journey Through Life*, and another on *Edith Stein: Seeker of Truth*.<sup>143</sup> Other study guides are in development on the themes of vocation, St. Teresa of Avila, Pope Benedict's encyclical *On Christian Love*, and Augustine's *Confessions*. Each study focuses on how their

---

136. See, e.g., Women of Grace Homepage, <http://www.lhla.org/womenofgrace/wog-vision-mission.html> (last visited Jan. 13, 2010); ENDOW Homepage, <https://www.endowonline.com> (last visited Jan. 13, 2010).

137. ENDOW About Us, <https://www.endowonline.com/about-us> (last visited Sept. 28, 2009). I am on the Advisory Board of ENDOW and have been directly involved in teaching about woman's identity, according to the Catholic Faith, since ENDOW's beginning.

138. What Exactly Is ENDOW, <https://www.endowonline.com/resources/front-page/what-exactly-is-endow> (last visited Jan. 13, 2010).

139. See ENDOW Homepage, *supra* note 136.

140. See *id.*

141. ENDOW About Us, *supra* note 137.

142. ENDOW Classes (Register), <https://www.endowonline.com/endow-classes> (last visited Jan. 13, 2010).

143. *Id.*

subject is related to woman's dignity and vocation. Study guides for high school and junior high students and Spanish translations are also becoming available.

B. *Ransoming Humanism, Gender, Complementarity, and New Feminism*

A second plan of action is to pay careful attention to language and ways it may be used to distort the truth about woman's and man's identities. These distortions have a deep impact on the thinking of the English-speaking public especially, but also on others who speak and think in the languages with similar structures and meanings. In effect, we need to make a special effort to overcome the pernicious effects of a residual pragmatism, which argues that truth is simply something that is repeated often enough.<sup>144</sup> We see this method of persuasion pervasively practiced in today's political events, but its deep-seated roots follow a well-known pattern of "the father of lies."<sup>145</sup>

Let me begin by taking the word *humanism*. The first great articulation of humanism occurred with the Catholic Renaissance, and it gave a deeply Christian answer to the questions of what it means to be really human, humane, and learned.<sup>146</sup> After the word "humanism" had acquired a very positive connotation within the Catholic tradition, others began to kidnap it and then distort its denotative meaning. Karl Marx in one of his early writings stated, "This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man."<sup>147</sup> William James, an American pragmatist, said something similar: "Laws and languages at any rate are thus seen to be man-made things. Mr. [F.C.S.] Schiller applies the analogy to beliefs, and proposes the name of 'Humanism' for the doctrine that to an unascertainable extent our truths are man-made products too."<sup>148</sup>

---

144. See WILLIAM JAMES, PRAGMATISM (1907), *reprinted in* PRAGMATISM AND FOUR ESSAYS FROM THE MEANING OF TRUTH 11, 133, 144–45 (Ralph Barton Perry ed., New Am. Library 1974).

145. Cf. *John* 8:44.

146. See Sr. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *Can Feminism Be a Humanism?*, in *WOMEN IN CHRIST: TOWARD A NEW FEMINISM*, *supra* note 85, at 251, 255–56.

147. KARL MARX, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND COMMUNISM (1844), *reprinted in* KARL MARX, EARLY WRITINGS 345, 348 (Penguin Classics 1992) (1975).

148. JAMES, *supra* note 144, at 159.

Then, not to be outdone, John Paul Sartre did something similar in his work *Existentialism is a Humanism*.<sup>149</sup> Sartre wrote, “[W]hat we call ‘Existentialism humanism’ [is a] [h]umanism, because we remind man that there is no lawmaker other than himself, and that in his forlornness he will decide by himself . . . .”<sup>150</sup> Thus, we have the original Catholic meaning of Renaissance humanism very consciously and willfully kidnapped, held captive and harmed—but not put to death—by Marxist humanism, pragmatic humanism, and existential humanism.

Pope John Paul II sought to ransom humanism by promoting actively a new Christian humanism that reached back to the original roots of Renaissance humanism and forged ahead in twentieth-century philosophy and theology as an existential personalism or Lublin Existential Thomism.<sup>151</sup> In *Mulieris Dignitatem* we find an echo of this ransoming in the Pope’s emphasis that “both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree” and “[m]an is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God.”<sup>152</sup>

The second word that needs to be ransomed is *gender*. In contemporary discussions, the phrases “gender system,” “gender ideology,” “gender agenda,” and “gender feminists” use the word “gender” in its pragmatic secular feminist or radical feminist denotations.<sup>153</sup> For them, “gender” means simply a socially constructed identity that simply fades into an androgyny, which, in most cases, divorces sex acts from personal identity and man-woman complementarity.<sup>154</sup>

If Catholics want to ransom “gender,” then we must return to the etymological root of the word—*gens*.<sup>155</sup> *Gens* refers to the biological

149. JEAN PAUL SARTRE, *EXISTENTIALISM IS A HUMANISM* (1946), *reprinted in* *EXISTENTIALISM VERSUS MARXISM: CONFLICTING VIEWS ON HUMANISM* 70 (George Novak ed., 1966).

150. *Id.* at 84.

151. *See generally* ANDREW N. WOZNICKI, *A CHRISTIAN HUMANISM: KAROL WOJTYLA’S EXISTENTIAL PERSONALISM* (1980).

152. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 6 (emphasis omitted).

153. *See* Jutta Burggraf, *Gender*, in *PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY LEXICON: AMBIGUOUS AND DEBATABLE TERMS REGARDING FAMILY LIFE AND ETHICAL QUESTIONS* 399–408 (2006); DALE O’LEARY, *THE GENDER AGENDA: REDEFINING EQUALITY* 155–59 (1997); MARGUERITE A. PEETERS, *THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE WESTERN CULTURAL REVOLUTION: KEY CONCEPTS, OPERATIONAL MECHANISMS* 71–74 (Benedict Kobus trans., 2007); CHRISTINA HOFF SOMMERS, *WHO STOLE FEMINISM? HOW WOMEN HAVE BETRAYED WOMEN* 16–22 (1995).

154. *See* PEETERS, *supra* note 153, at 71–74.

155. *See* 4 *THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY* 100 (3rd ed. 1970).

relation of families through the generations and to a biblical anthropology that returns to *Genesis* and the mandate that God revealed to the first man and woman to generate or multiply.<sup>156</sup> This blessing and mission was given for generation upon generation. In this light, the separation of sex and gender is an absurdity. Gender includes the meaning of heterosexual acts that make intergenerational families possible. We could call this a kind of transcendental argument that reveals the superficiality of the so-called “gender ideologists” with their “gender agenda,” which sees gender as only a socially constructed reality.<sup>157</sup> Thus, contemporary Catholics should not accept the incorrect rendering of “gender” but instead work hard to ransom it and make the word an ontological reference for how a man and a woman are engendered in two ways by their birth and by God for particular purposes and vocations in the Church and apostolic missions in the world. In this understanding, the gender of men and women includes sex-identity, but may or may not include sex acts, depending upon the man’s or woman’s particular state of life.

The third word that we need to ransom is *complementarity*. This word has both religious and secular roots. The secular root comes from its use by the physicist Niels Bohr in 1927, describing the complementarity of wave and particle theories of light.<sup>158</sup> Then in 1929, Dietrich von Hildebrand extended its use specifically to describe the metaphysical complementarity of a man and a woman in marriage.<sup>159</sup> When an English translation of Hildebrand’s text was

156. See WEBSTER’S UNABRIDGED DICTIONARY 797 (Random House 2d ed. 2001) (defining “gens” as an anthropological group tracing common descent in the male line); *Genesis* 1:28 (Revised Standard, Catholic Version) (“God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it . . .’”).

157. See PEETERS, *supra* note 153, 70–74; MARGUERITE A. PEETERS, THE NEW GLOBAL ETHIC: CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH 8, <http://www.laici.org/peeters2.pdf> (last visited Oct. 21, 2009).

158. See 1 NIELS BOHR, *The Quantum Postulate and the Recent Development of Atomic Theory*, in ATOMIC THEORY AND THE DESCRIPTION OF NATURE: PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS OF NIELS BOHR 52 (Ox Bow Press 1987) (1934).

The two views of the nature of light [as wave or as particle] are rather to be considered as different attempts at an interpretation of experimental evidence in which the limitation of the classical concepts is expressed in complementary ways.

. . . In fact, here again we are not dealing with contradictory but with complementary pictures of the phenomena, which only together offer a natural generalization of the classical mode of description.

*Id.* at 56.

159. See generally DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND, MARRIAGE: THE MYSTERY OF FAITHFUL LOVE (Sophia Inst. Press 1997) (1929).

published in 1942, Bernard Lonergan reviewed it and began to speak of the complementarity of the man and woman in generation.<sup>160</sup>

The specifically religious root of the ontological complementarity of a man and a woman was identified by Pope John Paul II in his Wednesday audiences on *Genesis*, shortly after becoming Pope in 1978.<sup>161</sup> On November 21, 1979, he stated, “[M]asculinity and femininity . . . are two complementary dimensions of self-consciousness and self-determination and . . . two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body.”<sup>162</sup> On January 2, 1980, he noted the “reciprocal complementarity [of the sexes] precisely because they are ‘male’ and ‘female,’” and observed that “[m]an and woman constitute two different ways of the human ‘being a body’ in the unity of [God’s] image.”<sup>163</sup> Here Revelation reveals, according to the Catholic exegesis of *Genesis* by the Holy Father, the prime ontological meaning of complementarity of a man and a woman as the two reciprocal ways the human being is engendered and called into relation with one another through marriage.

The words “complementary” and “complementarity” imply for the Church a simultaneous equality of dignity and significant differentiation especially found in man-woman complementarity.<sup>164</sup> The Charter of Rights of the Family, presented to the world by the Holy See on October 22, 1983, supports an “intimate union of life in complementarity between a man and a woman [in the] bond of matrimony.”<sup>165</sup> Additionally, a letter dated October 1, 1986, from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the Bishops of the Catholic Church clearly qualified the meaning of complementary. It pointed out that “[h]omosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life.”<sup>166</sup> The Pontifical Council for the Family elaborated further the principle of intergender complementarity in

---

160. See BERNARD LONERGAN, *Review of Dietrich von Hildebrand, Marriage*, in COLLECTION: PAPERS BY BERNARD LONERGAN 314 (Frederick E. Crowe ed., Lonergan Research Inst., Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan no. 4, 1967); see also Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Finality, Love, Marriage*, 4 THEOLOGICAL STUDIES 477, 491–96, 502 (1943) (adopting the word “complementary” to describe man-woman relations).

161. THEOLOGY OF THE BODY, *supra* note 39, at 47–49.

162. *Id.* at 48, 51.

163. *Id.* at 58, 60.

164. See *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 6.

165. The Holy See, *Charter of the Rights of the Family* pmb. ¶ B (Oct. 22, 1983), in 13 ORIGINS 461, 461 (1983).

166. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* ¶ 7 (1986), in 16 ORIGINS 377, 379 (1986).

1995.<sup>167</sup> The Council stated, “Femininity and masculinity are complementary gifts, through which human sexuality is an integrating part of the concrete capacity for love which God has inscribed in man and woman.”<sup>168</sup> The complementarity of the two sexes is marked on the physical, psychological, and spiritual level of man and woman. In the *Letter to Women*, Pope John Paul II clarified: “Womanhood and manhood are complementary *not only from the physical and psychological points of view*, but also from the *ontological*.”<sup>169</sup> Through these elaborations it is evident that complementarity refers to the ontological identity of the whole woman and the whole man as a composite unity of body, mind, and spirit, brought into union with one another on all these levels of their personal identity.<sup>170</sup>

Parallel to the Catholic authors’ development of the meaning of complementarity, Protestants introduced two different notions of complementarity. Kevin Giles since the 1970s has defended what has become known as “egalitarian complementarity” of men and women.<sup>171</sup> This position argues that men and women have equal and complementary roles in the Church, but differences in roles soon dissolve.<sup>172</sup> Thus, egalitarian complementarity becomes, in effect, a unisex position in which differences become increasingly insignificant.<sup>173</sup> Giles consistently defended this Protestant egalitarian position through 2005.<sup>174</sup>

A very different Protestant use of complementarity is found in the “hierarchical complementarity” position of John Piper and Wayne Grudem, as developed in several of their writings.<sup>175</sup> In

167. Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (1995), in 25 ORIGINS 529 (1996).

168. *Id.* ¶ 10.

169. *Letter to Women*, *supra* note 85, ¶ 7.

170. See Allen, *supra* note 85, at 94 (discussing different dimensions of complementarity).

171. See KEVIN GILES, WOMEN & THEIR MINISTRY: A CASE FOR EQUAL MINISTRIES IN THE CHURCH TODAY 12–13, 25 (1977).

172. See KEVIN GILES, THE TRINITY & SUBORDINATIONISM: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD & THE CONTEMPORARY GENDER DEBATE 7–8, 79, 167 (2002).

173. See, e.g., GILES, *supra* note 171 (arguing for the abolition of sex-based distinctions in church ministries).

174. See Kevin Giles, *The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women*, in RONALD W. PIERCE ET AL., DISCOVERING BIBLICAL EQUALITY: COMPLEMENTARITY WITHOUT HIERARCHY 334–52 (2d ed. 2005). I am grateful for extensive personal correspondence with Dr. Giles on our respective positions.

175. See JOHN PIPER & WAYNE GRUDEM, CAN OUR DIFFERENCES BE SETTLED? A DETAILED RESPONSE TO THE EVANGELICAL FEMINIST POSITION STATEMENT OF CHRISTIANS FOR BIBLICAL EQUALITY 13–15, 19, 24, 29–31 (1992); see also JOHN PIPER & WAYNE GRUDEM, FIFTY CRUCIAL

response to the unisex position of the egalitarian complementarians, the hierarchical complementarians argue that the biblical view of man-woman identities and relations demand a subordination of woman to the headship of man in the marriage.<sup>176</sup>

The Catholic response is to view both of these Protestant complementarity theories as distortions of the ontological complementarity so well developed by Pope John Paul II. In particular, the egalitarian complementarian position neglects the significant differences between men and women. The hierarchical complementarian position neglects the fundamental equality of man and woman and their mutual submission out of love of Christ.<sup>177</sup>

A more extreme distortion of the use of “complementarity,” however, has been recently articulated by two Catholic theologians from Creighton University, Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler.<sup>178</sup> Generally speaking, their position, based on a Cartesian and Lockean distinction between person and body, argues that homosexual marriage should be supported through an argument which places personal complementarity above bodily genital complementarity in the sexual act.<sup>179</sup> They confuse Catholic distinctions about different *aspects* of complementary relations with different *so-called complementary parts* of persons in relation. While excellent rebuttals to this distortion of Salzman and Lawler have been

---

QUESTIONS: AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRAL CONCERNS ABOUT MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD (1992); JOHN PIPER, WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE? MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD DEFINED ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE (2009); RECOVERING BIBLICAL MANHOOD & WOMANHOOD: A RESPONSE TO EVANGELICAL FEMINISM (John Piper & Wayne Grudem eds., 2006) (1991).

176. See generally RECOVERING BIBLICAL MANHOOD & WOMANHOOD, *supra* note 175, at 31–178.

177. Cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, *supra* note 1, ¶ 24 (repeating this important aspect of *Ephesians* 5 several times).

[T]he 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, behavior and customs. This is a call which from that time onwards does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew.

*Id.*

178. See generally Todd A. Salzman & Michael G. Lawler, *Catholic Sexual Ethics: Complementarity and the Truly Human*, 67 THEOLOGICAL STUDIES 625 (2006).

179. See E. Christian Brugger, *Dualism and Homosexual ‘Complementarity’: A Reply to Salzman and Lawler* [sic], 14 JOSEPHINUM J. OF THEOLOGY 218 (2007) (summarizing Salzman and Lawler’s argument of homosexual complementarity and refuting their anthropological premises as unsound).

recently published,<sup>180</sup> it is important to recognize that we must fight to ransom the meaning of integral gender complementarity as developed and defended in Catholic teachings for nearly thirty years.

Finally, we need to work to advance the “new feminism” of Pope John Paul II. The word “feminism” did not come into use until late in the nineteenth century.<sup>181</sup> However, the concept of feminism as an organized thought and action that sought to remove obstacles to the full development of women began with Christine de Pizan and Renaissance humanism in the early fifteenth century.<sup>182</sup> Rooted in Catholic thought, it identified prejudice and satires against women as the main obstacles, and it proposed education and direct appeal to God as the appropriate counteraction.<sup>183</sup>

In Western history a kind of Enlightenment feminism emerged in post-Cartesian works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>184</sup> This form of feminism identified custom, which barred women’s access to higher education, suffrage, and participation in political office, as the main obstacle, and it proposed formal education and citizenship rights as the remedy.<sup>185</sup> In the nineteenth century, Marxist humanism identified private property, monogamy, and class division as the obstacles for women and argued abortion and class revolution were the remedy.<sup>186</sup> In the early twentieth century, existential humanism identified God and the woman’s body as obstacles to her development and proposed that abortion, the rejection of childbearing and marriage, and the appropriation of a new transcendent subjectivity as the remedy.<sup>187</sup> During the same period, pragmatic or secular feminism argued that belief in objective truth and organized religion, the lack of full citizenship, and discrimination in the work place were obstacles for women and proposed that abortion, birth control, participation in politics, preferential hiring, and reverse discrimination were the remedies.<sup>188</sup>

---

180. See, e.g., *id.* at 219–21; PATRICK LEE & ROBERT P. GEORGE, BODY-SELF DUALISM IN CONTEMPORARY ETHICS AND POLITICS 204–07 (2008).

181. Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Problem of Feminism in the Fifteenth Century, in* WOMEN OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD 337, 337 (Julius Kirshner & Suzanne F. Wemple eds., 1985).

182. 2:1 ALLEN, *supra* note 37, at 537–658 (2002).

183. Allen, *supra* note 146, at 255–58.

184. *Id.* at 259.

185. *Id.* at 259–65.

186. *Id.* at 265–68.

187. *Id.* at 268–72.

188. *Id.* at 272–77.

In response to all these previous kinds of “old feminisms,” Pope John Paul II’s “new feminism” is actually an effort to ransom the deep Catholic meaning of feminism away from its kidnapped state in Marxist feminism, secular humanist feminism, existential feminism, and postmodern feminism.<sup>189</sup> The roots of the new feminism run deep in the culture of Catholic life and began with Catholic Renaissance feminism. These roots bear fruit in the genius of women, flourishing for the good of all women, men, and children.<sup>190</sup> They draw upon personalism and phenomenology to defend the dignity of the human person, and thus reject any feminism which would eliminate groups of persons, such as men, unborn children, the wealthy, or the poor, from its work for the common good.<sup>191</sup>

The “new feminism” of John Paul II, as a Christian feminism, defends the dignity of each human person from conception until natural death. It argues that all feminisms ought to be measured by the principle of human life: “Society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person’s life.”<sup>192</sup> While John Paul II’s new feminism is willing to collaborate with persons from the old feminisms on areas of discrimination, exploitation, and violence against women, it is completely pro-life in contrast to the increasing reach of the culture of death so inherent in the various forms of old feminism.

### CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the internal content of John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, what can one conclude about its main contribution to contemporary discussions on woman’s dignity and vocation? In short, it is a direction-changing document for understanding the source and consequences of a woman’s dignity. While many of its chapters reassert the traditional teachings about what happens to women when they encounter Jesus Christ, others strike new interpretations in the light of Catholic tradition.

What has been restated includes the following: the truth about woman, as one of two ways of being a human being, is discovered

---

189. *Id.* at 282–84; Allen, *supra* note 85, at 86–104.

190. Allen, *supra* note 146, at 284.

191. *Id.* at 283–84.

192. *Evangelium Vitae*, *supra* note 64, ¶ 81; see also Allen, *supra* note 85, at 86–93 (noting differences between the new and old feminism).

through both faith and reason; sin has caused a serious rupture in relations between women and men; encountering Jesus Christ frees a woman from the inheritance of original sin and reinvites the entrusting of woman and man to each other; and there are two paradigm vocations for women in the Church, sacramental marriage and spiritual marriage of the consecrated life.

John Paul II's innovative principles about women's dignity and vocation, drawn from his formation within Christian personalism, include the following: the Annunciation is an interpersonal dialogue in which Mary fully participates with her intellect and will as a complete human person; that *communio*, the interpersonal communion of a man and a woman, shares a likeness with the divine communion; integral gender complementarity, that woman and man are equally human beings and simultaneously significantly different; man's tendency to dominate women and women's tendency to want to possess men are effects of, not punishments for, original sin; that in marriage, this equality must be understood as *mutual* subjection of women and men out of reverence for Christ; that a new feminism is needed which rejects all forms of domination; that woman's genius is rooted in her concern for the human being in every situation because of an awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way; that women must lead men to this same recognition of the dignity of every human being; and that this contribution of women is needed for authentic cultural change.

The Article concludes with some suggestions about a new evangelization through educating women about their authentic identity. It identifies some key words and phrases, such as humanism, gender, complementarity, and feminism, that have become distorted in contemporary culture and need to be ransomed by careful writing and public speaking. This is an area in which legal argumentation could be a great service to the new evangelization. Finally, the world eagerly awaits another apostolic letter from a subsequent pope on the "Dignity and Vocation of Men" (the male human being). If such a letter were to have the depth and originality of John Paul II's *Dignity and Vocation of Women*, then it will become a great impetus for further new evangelization and authentic cultural change.