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## FEMINISM, NATURE AND *HUMANAE VITAE*: WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

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“Mutual self-donation in a *communio personarum*, a community of persons, was the moral framework—the *humanistic* framework—in which to ponder the question of birth control,” writes Michael Waldstein of the personalist vision of Pope John Paul II, even in his pre-papal writing.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the venerable servant of God insisted as no less “indispensable”<sup>2</sup> to a satisfactory consideration of woman’s dignity and vocation than to that of *Humanae Vitae*, what he esteems an “adequate anthropology” as summarized in *Gaudium et spes*, nr. 24.<sup>3</sup> “Man”, we read in that passage—so we are already off to a bad start, from a feminist point of view!—“who is the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.”<sup>4</sup> It is precisely in

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this, moreover, that John Paul II recognized the meaning of being in the image and likeness of God: that “man”—and honestly, we all know that the council meant “man *and* woman”—“is called to exist ‘for’ others, to become a gift.”<sup>5</sup>

Four years before the Council promulgated these words, Valerie Saiving—in a very influential publication providing the “initial stirrings” of feminist theology<sup>6</sup>—objected to any such presentation of self-giving love

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as bespeaking a masculine idea of redemption with regard to the particularly masculine sin of “pride, will-to-power, exploitation, self-assertiveness, and the treatment of others as objects rather than persons.”<sup>7</sup> Women, on the other hand, Saiving notes, tend to very different forms of sin which read more like “triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one’s own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason—in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self.”<sup>8</sup> These, Saiving maintains, are “outgrowths of the basic feminine character structure,”<sup>9</sup> whose content remains ambiguous, although her analysis addresses both that which is natural and acquired in woman.<sup>10</sup> Both boys and girls must learn to differentiate themselves from their mothers who, in every society, bear children and are closest to them in their infancy and early childhood. Precisely this process of differentiation is, however, different for boys and girls. Whereas a girl attains to sexual maturity, including

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motherhood, quite naturally,<sup>11</sup> a boy experiences his manhood as an achievement, as something that he must *acquire*. A girl simply *is* a woman—at least potentially—but a boy must *prove* himself a man.<sup>12</sup> This phenomenon, which Saiving presents as cross-cultural, is further accented—as other feminists have noted<sup>13</sup>—in a contemporary western culture which not only encourages boys to be detached from their mothers, but also educates them according to the cultural ideal of isolated individualism.<sup>14</sup> Girls, by contrast, are encouraged, even within this same cultural context, to develop a self-identity based on connection with and similarity to their mothers.

While Saiving's analysis was intended to demonstrate the male bias in a theology purporting to address the universal human situation without addressing the particular experiences of women,<sup>15</sup> her critique is one that

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cuts to the very heart of John Paul II's so-called "adequate anthropology" and even to the very heart of the Christian faith, as is evident in her argument as follows:

If human nature and the human situation are not as described [by male theologians], then the assertion that self-giving love is the law of man's being is irrelevant and may even be untrue.<sup>16</sup>

It must be granted that Saiving specifically addresses with these words neither the theological vision of the Council nor that of John Paul.<sup>17</sup> Her argument nonetheless raises very significant questions, foundational to the teaching of *Humanae vitae*: *Firstly*, that of whether it is at all possible to address human love—and thus also the ends of marriage—in objective terms: in terms—to borrow from Saiving—addressing a "universal human situation" as opposed to a cultural situation marked by individualism, for example; *secondly*, whether it is possible to speak of self-realization in those same terms; whether, in other words, one might actually find oneself in the very act that appears as its contrary: that act expressed in the important Gospel formulation, "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but however loses his life will preserve it."<sup>18</sup> These two essential questions presuppose, in turn, a *third*, requiring that we address it before the others: that of whether we might admit a metaphysical human nature, a nature, more specifically, implying an orientation to the properly human good of communion; whence, *finally*, the question of the "place" (if any) of sexuality within that nature (if any).

## I.

Of no little significance to this inquiry of the nature of love and human realization—not only for Saiving's argument, but also for my own—is the question inspiring John Paul II's apostolic letter on the dignity and vocation of women: that, more specifically, "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."<sup>19</sup> This very formulation, which grounds sexual difference in the mystery of creation, lies in contrast to the highly influential slogan of Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."<sup>20</sup> In Beauvoir's vision—and in the wide

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approval that it has received among feminists<sup>21</sup>—is evident not only the sex-gender separation characteristic of modern feminism, but also the feminist denial of the whole metaphysical content of human nature, which has—like women herself under patriarchal control, that is to say, as she is perceived by feminism—been reduced to a sub-rational reality. Because it is woman’s “misfortune” to be “biologically destined” to transmit life, Simone de Beauvoir challenges her—that is to say, each woman—to rise above the “animal” act of *giving* life and to share instead in the masculine act of *risking* life. In so doing, she is said by Beauvoir to transcend the natural realm and enter into the properly human sphere, wherein man resides. It is in woman’s possibilities—which Beauvoir contrasts to her actual state—that she is comparable to man who, the French philosopher maintains, is a historical idea rather than a natural species.<sup>22</sup>

The feminist objection to a preconceived nature—one that is dynamically programmed by the Creator—is, therefore, based not so much upon a presentation of *human* nature, as upon the notion of a properly *feminine* nature which is aligned with the animal, or sub-rational, realm at odds with, or otherwise opposed to, the normative *male*, or rational, nature.<sup>23</sup> Refusing—with good reason—to be reduced to their biological structure and/or to be “measured” by the male standard according to which they are judged not only different, but truly “Other,”<sup>24</sup> many feminists simply refuse to grant any metaphysical content to sexual differences.<sup>25</sup> Hence *the body-spirit dual-*

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*ism* that they so often attribute to “androcentric” logic<sup>26</sup> is transformed—as feminists have not only observed but also advanced—into *a male-female dualism* which, in turn, has given birth to a sort of androgynous hybrid that is both ideological and reactionary. Denied or otherwise refused are thus *the essential differences within human nature itself—namely sexual differences* affecting the whole body-spirit union of the human person—in virtue of which this nature might be understood as *relational per se*.<sup>27</sup>

It is precisely this refuted optic that lies at the heart of the catechism’s presentation of sexuality as affecting “all aspects of the human person in the unity of his [or her] body and soul” and thus also, more specifically, of “affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.”<sup>28</sup> Hence, in the feminist refutation of the metaphysical value of sexual difference, we are once again confronted with the question which more directly concerns us: that of human love and that, more precisely, of its metaphysical grounding.

## II.

Such a metaphysical nature of love—one, more specifically, which is rooted within the human subject, and not only within his body<sup>29</sup>—might be explained in terms of the scholastic maxim: the good is what all things seek;<sup>30</sup> or “love denotes a certain adapting of the appetitive power

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to some good.”<sup>31</sup> It follows, then—at least for the scholastic mind—that love aims at a commingling of the subject and the object towards which he or she is naturally and willfully bent,<sup>32</sup> an idea sadly lacking in most feminist claims.<sup>33</sup> Love proper to the will is, in other words, by its very nature, transitive and personal. “To love,” Josef Pieper explains, “always implies to love *someone* or *something*. And if this element is missing in a definition, it has failed to hit its target.”<sup>34</sup> This, in turn, means that there is a double dynamic involved in the movements motivated by love. I am, firstly, drawn *inwardly* (or subjectively) toward that which (or toward one whom) I passionately or instinctively desire or, more nobly<sup>35</sup>, toward that which (or toward one whom) I willfully—that is rationally—esteem as *good* and thus desirable. Secondly, I am at the same time—hence the priority is not temporal but ontological—drawn *outwardly* (or objectively) as it were, by an *actual* attraction whose force lies less in me than in the objective goodness of the person or thing whom I love.<sup>36</sup> These two aspects of attraction—the subjective and objective—are so interwoven in an actual act of love that it is, as Cornelius Murphy argues, “practically impossible to distinguish what is receptive from what is out-going.”<sup>37</sup> We might thus speak of a sort of magnetic force at work in the movements that we call “love”<sup>38</sup>: a force supposing a potential, or passive, force of *attraction* rooted within me—that is to say, in my nature—in the form of

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my natural, sensitive and rational appetites;<sup>39</sup> and a force of *attracting* rooted in the objective nature of the object or person whom I love. Hence, as Aquinas explains, it is the object of love that is the *cause* of love,<sup>40</sup> whence the twofold distinction regarding the union of lover and beloved: the *real union*, “consisting in the conjunction of the one with the other,” which is proper to joy or pleasure, and the *affective union*—preceding both this real union and even the movement of desire toward this end—consisting in “an aptitude or proportion” in virtue of which one might be said to already partake of that toward which (or the one toward whom) he or she is thus inclined.<sup>41</sup> This means, as Michael Sherwin has masterfully argued, that before love is a principle of action, it is “a response to goodness,”<sup>42</sup> particularly in the form of “a pleasant affective affinity” that St. Thomas calls *complacentia*.<sup>43</sup>

These two interwoven aspects of love—the subjective and objective dimensions which meet in *complacentia*—might also be interpreted in terms of ecstasy: that love whereby the lover is moved out of himself,<sup>44</sup> as is the case in a properly erotic love. The so-called lover, who remains concentrated upon his own interest, does not really love in the proper sense, C.S. Lewis tells us. It is not union with the Beloved that he seeks, but merely the pleasure that she might afford him. His desire is simply for *a* woman, in contrast to the one beloved woman whom the truly erotic lover contemplates day and night.<sup>45</sup> From this perspective, love cannot be

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adequately addressed in terms of the popular maxim as “blind,” for it is necessarily endowed with an objective nature: objective with regard to *its object*—the other,<sup>46</sup> who is considered objectively attractive, and thus good, not only *for me* but *in se*<sup>47</sup>—and objective as to *its subject*, that is to say, with regard to the lover, who possesses the real capacity of being attracted to the other and thus also to being placed “outside himself,” so as to dwell upon the beloved or to be otherwise moved toward communion with her. This attraction, in other words, all in really being *rooted in the subject*, is nonetheless that whereby the lover is

orientated to the beloved *qua other*, and not simply as an object of his own interest. When such is the situation—when the lover is not really placed outside himself, as is the case in the love of concupiscence—the object of his love remains, in fact, himself.<sup>48</sup>

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When, therefore, we address love in terms of self-giving—as does Paul VI in *Humanae vitae*<sup>49</sup> and John Paul II in his defense of the same<sup>50</sup>—this need not be understood in the negative sense as self-abnegation or self-denial, but rather in the *positive sense* of a particular valorizing of the other, such that one is, as it were, forgetful of oneself: one's thoughts and energies are concentrated more upon the other than upon oneself. This is not to deny the fulfillment of one's own deepest desires; for these are simultaneously inclined, in a natural manner, to the being that is loved and to one's own good.<sup>51</sup> Eros, as Murphy explains, draws out of ourselves, “arousing yearnings of happiness that we are powerless to resist. However, it opens up possibilities that it cannot of itself fulfill;”<sup>52</sup> hence the distinction between the transient and the transcendent nature of love.<sup>53</sup> We are truly orientated to the other by every one of our appetitive powers—natural, sensual and rational—but our happiness does not lie *in* the other. Rather, that which we long for is the communion realized by a mutual gift of self: a communion which, far from negating the

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personality of its members, actually serves their development. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

When God-Yahweh says, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone’ (Gen 2:18), he affirms that, “alone,” the man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing “*with someone*”—and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing “*for someone*.” (...) Communion of persons means living in a reciprocal “for,” in a relationship of reciprocal gift.<sup>54</sup>

### III.

We are now, perhaps, better positioned to respond to Saiving's challenge of any notion of self-giving love which might foster the particular womanly tendency of seeking one's identity in another, a tendency which Saiving qualifies as sinful. “[I]f [as male theologians insist] this refusal to become selfless is wholly sinful,” she reasons, “then it would seem that we are obliged to try to overcome it; and, when it is overcome, to whatever extent this may be possible, we are left with a chameleon-like creature who responds to others but has no personal identity of his own.”<sup>55</sup>

Obviously, Saiving is not objecting to the traditional anthropological notion of transcendence—a dynamic tending of the person towards what is greater than him- or herself—but to its very contrary: the abasement or even denial of one's own self. On the other hand, the paradox of realizing oneself and even transcending oneself *precisely* in the act of being “emptied” after the pattern of Christ, as in the famous hymn of Philippians 2: 3-11<sup>56</sup>, is hardly avoidable in Christian thought and spir-

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ity. To reject this kenotic attitude is it would seem, as some Christian feminists have argued,<sup>57</sup> to reject the distinctively Christian manner of redemption. It is, in other words, not simply human self-realization that is in question, but salvation itself.<sup>58</sup>

Precisely this distinction which illuminates the seriousness of the stakes—the distinction between self-realization and salvation—might, it seems to me, serve our response to this important feminist challenge. As in the example of so valorizing another that one forgets or loses focus of oneself,<sup>59</sup> the denying of oneself for love of Christ is only *secondarily negative*. In the primary sense, it should be understood as the positive act of preparing oneself for the divine Visitor, of making room, or clearing space, within oneself for his divinizing visit, and thus also of ridding oneself of all that hinders communion with Him.<sup>60</sup> It is precisely within this communion, moreover, that salvation is realized and *not* within a Buddhist ideal of emptiness. It is in this communion that the human person is fulfilled to the very

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depths of his soul. “You made us for yourself, O Lord,” St. Augustine fittingly recognizes, “and our hearts are restless until we rest in you.”<sup>61</sup>

This analogy between the gift of self, whereby we are salvifically united with Christ, and the gift of self to the human other, whereby we might be said to realize ourselves as persons, or to realize our human potential, is also expressed in what Hans Urs von Balthasar calls, with reference to Genesis 2:23,<sup>62</sup> the “basic law” of the human person: “it is in the Thou (...) that we find our I.”<sup>63</sup> “God became man,” Balthasar explains, “so that this law, which is understandable to us—perhaps the most understandable of all the laws of life—should turn for us into the definitive law of being, explaining and satisfying everything.”<sup>64</sup> Obviously, he does not mean to thereby encourage the neglect or degradation of one’s own self and the subsequent assuming of another’s identity: that sinful refusal of one’s own “I” or of the dignity that is rightfully accorded to oneself as a being willed by God for his or her own sake.<sup>65</sup> Rather, this insight might be described by what Karol Wojtyla presents as “the law of the gift”<sup>66</sup>:

In the normal course of events, the *thou* assists me in more fully discovering and even confirming my own *I*: the *thou* contributes to my self-affirmation. In its basic form, the *I-thou* relationship, far from leading me away from my subjectivity, in some sense more firmly grounds me in it.<sup>67</sup>

Like Balthasar, Wojtyla explains this law in terms of human self-discovery within the specific context of the Genesis story of Eve’s creation. In the gift of the human other, the person is revealed to him (or her)self in the whole objective truth of his own ontological and ethical goodness: he understands himself not only as loved—and thus loveable—but also as capable of love and called to love. Loved into being by the Creator who—in virtue of the

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primary gift of human freedom—has entrusted the rational creature to himself, this creature comes to know himself as an *object* of love. With the gift of the woman—the gift of another human “I”—he is given, or revealed, to himself also and more specifically as a *subject* of love: his ontological orientation to interpersonal communion<sup>68</sup> is inwardly appropriated, as it were, and his loving powers are awakened within him. He thus knows himself as possessing a certain value not only “before God,” but also as for himself: “first,” John Paul II explains, “because he is ‘man’; second, because the ‘woman’ is for the man and, vice versa, the ‘man’ for the woman.”<sup>69</sup> The gift of the human other—whose reception is prepared by the gift of human freedom—is thus the origin of a call to interpersonal communion: to “the shared life that makes up the pure and simple guiding thread of human existence,”<sup>70</sup> wherein John Paul II recognizes the unfolding of the whole drama of human history, including the history of salvation.<sup>71</sup> It is a history marked by the determining question of *who she will be for him and he for her*, the question of whether a utilitarian or a personalist value will be ethically awarded to the ontological orientation expressed as “being for” another.<sup>72</sup>

#### IV.

Let us opt for the second of those meanings: the personalist meaning of “being for”. Would it not be possible from within this personalist optic to regard those so-called masculine and feminine tendencies to sin within

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more positive terms, namely, as tendencies *in love* and more specifically still as differing and complementary manners of self-giving: love in the form of self-bestowal and love in the form of receptive availability<sup>73</sup>?

Woman’s admittedly negative tendency to “dissipate herself in activities which are merely trivial,” make it possible, Saiving observes, “to perform cheerfully the thousand-and-one routine tasks—the woman’s work that is never done—which someone must do if life is to go on.”<sup>74</sup> Likewise, her sinful tendency—as noted by Edith Stein—to hover “anxiously over her children as if they were her own possessions,” binding them to herself at any cost, even that of their own freedom and that of her husband’s paternal authority and rights,<sup>75</sup> are more positively regarded, she notes, in terms of a particular capacity to sympathize with and serve other human beings,<sup>76</sup> a value which is addressed by John Paul II in terms of the specific “genius” of women.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, man’s sinful avoidance of his paternal responsibility, noticed by Stein, is countered by what she and Saiving both acknowledge as a certain pursuit of excellence and a highly creative spirit. He is also more likely, due to his more sensual nature, as Paul Quay notes, to initiate a romantic relationship than is woman, thereby assuming the risk of unreciprocated love.<sup>78</sup>

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The countering of what might be considered sinful tendencies with positive human values—both within each individual human person and within culture as a whole—is not,

however, realized in isolation but precisely within a community of persons, and more specifically still, although not exclusively, within that community of persons formed of the marriage bond: persons vowed to one another in an exclusive and permanent union, which is also open to life. My reasoning here is simple: this union so tightly binds its partners—not in what Edith Stein’s translator has rendered “the *separate* vocations of man and woman according to nature and grace”<sup>79</sup>—but rather in a common, *shared* vocation according to nature and grace: the universal human vocation to love.<sup>80</sup> It is, moreover, within the specific vocation of marriage and the experience of spousal love—the experience of being entrusted with the gift of the other person and his specific difference by the Creator himself—that might be awakened, John Paul II argues, a personal sense of responsibility for the other and his welfare: a responsibility that should be lived as “a sincere gift of self.”<sup>81</sup>

Beyond this, it is precisely because men and women really *are* different and really *do* give themselves differently, I maintain, that they are particularly suited to provide mutual help (cf. Gen 2:18), especially, but not exclusively, in their parenting responsibilities. In so doing, moreover, we come to a deeper knowledge of ourselves and to develop as persons, both individually and communally.<sup>82</sup> By this I do not mean that we simply rub up against

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another, purifying ourselves and the other in the process, like two diamonds in the rough. Nor is this a matter of seeking—precisely in our contrasts—the Aristotelian “mean” wherein virtue is said to reside,<sup>83</sup> or of becoming an accomplice to the other’s shortcomings, as is the case of the silent, perfectly submissive wife, who might be thought of, in the words of Jean Bethke Elshtain, as the “perfect companion to the ‘self-made man’

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whose tough, pragmatic, no-nonsense code is ‘free choice,’ ‘no constraints,’ and ‘my life is my own.’”<sup>84</sup> Rather, that mysterious “law” of finding one’s “I” in the “thou” is operative here in a special way: not in the so-called feminine tendency to lose oneself or one’s identity in the other, the concentrating of one’s energies so much upon another’s life that we prevent him from authentically living his own.<sup>85</sup> Nor, in that more “masculine” tactic of conforming the other to my vision of things, of aggressively seeking her good or even preparing her whole future for her and then requiring of her—for her “own good,” of course—to assume her place therein. Nor, still, is this the somewhat androgynous ridding oneself of any such tendency whatsoever or the striving to adopt, for oneself, the other’s particular character structure. No, this finding of oneself in the other means that the “thou” reveals my feminine specificity to me in contrast—or better, in its *complementarity*—to his own masculinity. More significantly still, my femininity is revealed in the value that he accords to it as an essential, *innate* aspect of my person as sexed. As such, it is specifically entrusted to him, with my entire person, for his safekeeping, a safekeeping requiring that he encourage my human, feminine and personal growth, from whence we might recognize a certain harmony between the cultural, or acquired, aspects of femininity and the innate ones.<sup>86</sup> And indeed, it is his sincere love for me—his delight in the fact that I exist *as me*, and thus also *as feminine*—that both encourages and incites my own particularly feminine manner of loving him in return.<sup>87</sup>

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Precisely in receiving him *as a man*—as gratefully encouraging and promoting his masculinity and accepting his self-gift in the form of my own self-gift—I, in turn, encourage, foster and promote his specifically masculine manner of loving.<sup>88</sup> In so doing, I say in my own particularly feminine manner, what Bobby Vinton made popular in his 1968 hit because it was true: “Darling, most of all, I love how you love me.”

## V.

Assuredly, to conclude, we are not without an alternative to this vision of things. In fact, many individualistic and self-centered men, as well as a growing number of independently-minded and willfully “unhampered” women, prefer the tune of Tina Turner’s “What’s Love Got to do with It?” There are, however, consequences to the words we live by. Loving one another as our humanity requires—as befits the personalist definition of the person<sup>89</sup>—entails *allowing* the other to give him- or herself to me and to others. To the extent that the so-called masculine tendency toward individualism has hindered authentic self-giving among men, it has likewise hindered self-giving among women. It should not come as a surprise, then, that many women have experienced self-giving as self-abnegation. On the other hand, when we refuse to give ourselves *as women*—in our body-spirit whole, including our female fertility—we simultaneously refuse to receive our husbands *as men*: to receive them, in other words, in that “reciprocally completing” manner, as John Paul II puts it, of “being a body and at the same time as being human.”<sup>90</sup> We consequently frus-

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trate our husbands’ masculine manner of giving themselves and thus also that revelation of our own specific beauty and truth as feminine. We furthermore deny that prophetic display of “genius,” that particularly feminine sensitivity for persons, that Pope John Paul II challenges us to provide in the promotion of a culture of life.<sup>91</sup> That genius is most especially at work when a woman witnesses to her husband that of which she is keenly aware: that in receiving his love, she is receiving his very person, and not only his person, but also his seed. In accepting that seed as proof of her love for him, she not only realizes her own vocation as wife and potential mother<sup>92</sup>, she also reveals the man to himself as husband and potential father.

Human love—especially marital love—is not, therefore, a finding of oneself in the other by way of either identification or aggressive dominance; nor is it a simple vis-à-vis without transcendence, a self-serving communion which like feminism and the culture as a whole, “vacillates between,” what Balthasar describes as, “the emancipation of the micro-ego in anarchic sovereignty and the emancipation of a ‘we’, a macro-ego, in a collective tyranny that absorbs the freedom of the individual.”<sup>93</sup> No, true love is rather “ecstasy,” as Pope Benedict XVI, describes it:

not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: “Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it” (*Lk* 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. *Mt* 10:39; 16:25; *Mk* 8:35; *Lk* 9:24; *Jn* 12:25).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, translated by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation on the Dignity and Vocation of Women, *Mulieris dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), nr. 7.

<sup>3</sup> See Encyclical Letter “On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World,” *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), nr. 59; *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 7: “With these words, the council text presents a summary of the whole truth about man and woman...”. The significance that he awards to this passage explains the importance that it assumed in his magisterial writings. See Pascale Ide, “Une théologie du don. Les occurrences de *Gaudium et spes*, nr. 24, § 3 chez Jean-Paul II,” *Anthropotes* 17/1(2001), 149-178 ; 17/2 (2001), pp. 313-344.

<sup>4</sup> Council Vatican II, Pastoral Document on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, nr. 24. That creature, John Paul II specifies in his commentary in *Mulieris dignitatem*, “is thus a person. Being a person means striving towards self-realization (the Council text speaks of self-discovery), which can only be achieved ‘through a sincere gift of self.’” (n. 7) In this sense, self-realization is never really *self*-realization but rather *communal* human fulfillment. By this I mean—as will become increasingly evident—not only that we realize ourselves in the very acts whereby we contribute to the common good, but also that we are able to do so precisely because others are always and constantly contributing to our own good. Hence, personal realization—within which also consists the entire drama of salvation, as we shall see—is a properly *communal* fulfillment.

<sup>5</sup> *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 7.

<sup>6</sup> See Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Publishing, 1994), pp. 160-61. Sally Purvis explains that: “Both the content and the analytical method of Saiving’s article have become classics in Christian feminist work and are richly suggestive for developments by others.” (“Christian Feminist Ethics and the Family” in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*, edited by Anne Carr and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, p. 113). As a case in point, Saiving’s analysis is taken up and developed by Judith Plaskow who critiques the theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich for highlighting and developing “certain aspects of human experience” in their theologies while others, i.e. those of women, “are regarded as secondary or ignored.” “The effect of this tendency, which is not incidental but springs from the very definitions of sin and grace, is to identify human with male experience. This identification,” Plaskow concludes, “not only impoverishes theology but leads it to support prevailing definitions of femininity.” (*Sex, Sin and Grace: Women’s Experience in the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* [Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980], p. 4). In the meantime, American feminist theologians of such influence and stature as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza began critiquing not merely theologies purporting to speak from the universal human situation while reflecting a uniquely male perspective, but also the very Tradition and core symbolism of Christianity—indeed, even Scripture itself—as reflecting and reinforcing an oppressive patriarchal social structure. For more detail, see Michele M. Schumacher, “Feminine Experience and Religious Experience” in Michele M. Schumacher (ed.), *Women in Christ: Towards a New Feminism*, (Cambridge, UK & Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 169-200. It is also worth mentioning that arguments similar to that of Saiving (without direct reference) are developed by Elizabeth Johnson and Dalphne Hampson, to

name just two influential feminist theologians. The former argues that for women who have been oppressed the “language of conversion as loss of self, turning from *amour sui*, functions in an ideological way to rob them of power, maintaining them in a subordinate position to the benefit of those who rule.” (*She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* [New York: Crossroad, 1995, 1992], p. 77.) As for the second, she writes: “That it [*kenosis*] should have featured prominently in Christian thought is perhaps an indication of the fact that men have understood what the male problem, in thinking in terms of hierarchy and domination, has been. It may well be a model which men need to appropriate and which may helpfully be built into the male understanding of God. *But ... for women, the theme of self-emptying and self-abnegation is far from helpful as a paradigm.*” (*Theology and Feminism* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990], p. 155) For a development of this theme from a pastoral perspective, see B. L. Gill-Austern, “Love Understood as Self-Denial: What Does it do to Women?” in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, edited by J.S. Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), especially p. 304.

<sup>7</sup> Hence, the male conception of redemption “as restoring to man what he fundamentally lacks (namely, sacrificial love, the I-Thou relationship, the primacy of the personal, and, ultimately, peace).” (Valerie Saiving, “The Human Situation: A Feminine View,” *The Journal of Religion* [April 1960]: 100-112; reprinted in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow [San Francisco: Harder & Row, 1979], pp. 25-42; cited on p. 35).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. Similar is the list of specifically female weaknesses as addressed by Edith Stein. See her: *Essays on Woman* (Washington DC, ICS Publications, 1996<sup>2</sup>) and Mary Shivanandan, “Sentiment and Sentimentality: Woman’s Choice?” in *FCS Quarterly* (Spring 1997), pp. 7-17.

<sup>9</sup> Saiving, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Saiving follows Margaret Mead’s approach: “Instead of asking the question most of us ask: ‘Are character differences between the sexes the result of heredity or environment, of biology or culture?’ she asks, rather, whether there may not be certain basic similarities in the ways in which men and women in every culture have experienced what it means to be a man or to be a woman.” (*ibid.*, p. 29)

<sup>11</sup> “The processes of impregnation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation have a certain passivity about them; they are things which *happen* to a woman more than things that she *does*.” (*Ibid.*, p. 31)

<sup>12</sup> “The case is quite otherwise for the male, whose *active* desire and *active* performance in the sexual act is absolutely required for its completion. And here again the demand for performance is coupled with an inevitable anxiety; in order to prove his maleness, he *must* succeed in what he has undertaken—and it is possible for him to fail.” (*Ibid.*, p. 32) Similar is the analysis of Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo: “A woman becomes a woman by following in her mother’s footsteps, whereas there must be a break in a man’s experience. For a boy to become an adult, he must prove himself—his masculinity—among his peers. And although all boys may succeed in reaching manhood, cultures treat this development as something that each individual *has achieved*.” In contrast to womanhood as a natural category or criteria—woman being regarded as ‘naturally’ what she is—manhood is “a cultural product” achieved within a complex social structure including “elaborate systems of norms, ideals, and standards of evaluation” whereby men compete and order relationships among themselves.” (“Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview” in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michele Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974], p. 28). Emphasis mine.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Nancy Chodorow's classic work, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley /Los Angeles /London: University of California Press, 1978) and Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orback, "The Construction of Femininity" in *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, edited by Joann Wolski Conn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), pp. 128-149.

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent analysis of this cultural ideal of individualism, beyond the feminist critique, see Robert Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> Similar to Saiving's critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's theology on this ground, is Carol Gilligan's faulting of Lawrence Kohlberg for his failure to account for the experiences of women and girls in his moral development theory. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982); *ibid.*, *Mapping the Moral Domain* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> Saiving (*op. cit.*), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Rather, she provides a specific critique of the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr.

<sup>18</sup> Lk 17: 33. This Scriptural reference is actually cited in a footnote in the very passage of *Gaudium et spes* that we are considering: nr. 24.

<sup>19</sup> *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 267.

<sup>21</sup> This insight, Donna Haraway claims, originated all modern feminist accounts of gender. See "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary: the Sexual Politics of a Word," in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 64, 255. To assimilate woman to nature is, Beauvoir argues, "simply to act from prejudice" (p. 255). The idea that man is more of a historical idea than a natural species is attributed by Beauvoir to Merleau-Ponty. See *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> As summarized by Virginia A Held: "The philosophical tradition that has purported to present the view of the essentially and universally human has, masked by this claim, presented instead a view that is masculine, white, and Western." (*Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society and Politics* [Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993], p. 19). See Michele M. Schumacher, "The Nature of Nature in Feminism : Old and New" in *idem* (ed.), *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI /Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 17-51.

<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most classic argument among feminists in this regard is likewise that of Simone de Beauvoir: "She [woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other." (*The Second Sex*, p. xxii)

<sup>25</sup> See Beatriz Vollmer de Marcellus, *The Ontological Differentiation of Human Gender: A Critique of the Philosophical Literature between 1965 and 1995* (Philadelphia, Xlibris, 2004) and *idem* (published

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under her married name of Coles), “New Feminism: A Sex-Gender Reunion in *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, edited by Michele M. Schumacher (Cambridge & Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004): 52-104

<sup>26</sup> See Ina Praetorius, “In Search of the Feminine Condition: A Plea for a Women’s Ecumene,” *Concilium* (1991/6): 3-10, cited at p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> In question is, in the words of Margaret Mc Carthy, not simply “an ‘abstract’ belonging to human nature, standing outside of or alongside difference, but a likeness carried within difference.” (“‘Husbands, Love your Wives as Your own bodies’: Is Nuptial Love a Case of Love or its Paradigm?”, *Communio* 32 (Summer 2005), p. 288). Similar is the insight of Hans Urs von Balthasar, also noted by Mc Carthy: “God did not simply create mankind male and female as he had created the animals male and female.” To be sure, He created them “*to be one in the duality of sex,*” but he also, Hans Urs von Balthasar insists, “*created their duality out of their own oneness.*” (*The Christian State of Life*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983, p. 227).

<sup>28</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nr. 2332.

<sup>29</sup> In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love —*eros*—able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.” (*Deus caritas est*, nr. 5)

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, *Summa theologica* I-II, q. 27, a. 1, ad. 3; *ibid.*, q. 28, a. 6; q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 28, a. 5. English translation throughout from the Benzinger Brothers edition, 1947.

<sup>32</sup> “The rational creature,” Thomas argues, “naturally desires to be happy; hence, it cannot wish not to be happy.” (*Contra gentiles* IV, 92, 4); translated by Charles J. O’Neil (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), p. 339.

<sup>33</sup> The subtitle of Christina Traina’s notable exception is revelatory of the situation: *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> *About Love*, translated by Richard and Clara Winston (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), p. 77. Such, more specifically, is the love of friendship. See *Summa theologica* I, q. 20, a. 2, ad. 3.

<sup>35</sup> The specification bespeaks the degrees of the various appetites of human beings: the natural appetites which we also share with non-animated beings, the sensitive appetite that we share with irrational animals, and the rational appetite, which is proper to us, qua human. See *Summa theologica* I-II, q. 26, a. 1.

<sup>36</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, for example, that unlike the divine will, which creates the good in things and persons, our own human will is moved by the good *pre-existing* in things. See *Summa theologica* I-II, q. 110, a. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Beyond Feminism: Toward a Dialogue on Difference* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1995), p. 140.

<sup>38</sup> In question is whether in fact love might properly be considered a movement, as shall be made increasingly evident.

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<sup>39</sup> See *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 26, a. 1, and q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 27, a. 1; cf. *Ibid.*, q. 25, a. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 25, a. 2.

<sup>42</sup> More specifically: “It is a response to God’s goodness, to rational creatures’ fellowship in this goodness, and to the goodness proper to non-rational creatures in their ordered relationship to God and our fellowship with Him.” Michael S. Sherwin, “Aquinas, Augustine, and the Medieval Scholastic Crisis concerning Charity” in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, edited by Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 2007), pp. 181-204, cited at p. 199. See also his *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 2005), especially pp. 63-118.

<sup>43</sup> “This affinity,” Sherwin specifies, is “the aptitude, inclination, or proportion existing in the appetite for the loved object.” (*By Knowledge & By Love*, p. 70)

<sup>44</sup> “To suffer ecstasy means to be placed outside oneself.” (*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 28, a. 3)

<sup>45</sup> “We use a most unfortunate idiom [therefore] when we say, of a lustful man prowling the streets,” Lewis explains, “that he ‘wants a woman.’ Strictly speaking, a woman is just what he does not want. He wants a pleasure for which a woman happens to be the necessary piece of apparatus. How much he cares about the woman as such may be gauged by his attitude to her five minutes after fruition (one does not keep the carton after one has smoked the cigarettes).” (*The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960, 1988), p. 94. Similar is the insight of Pope Benedict XVI: “*Eros*, reduced to pure ‘sex’, has become a commodity, a mere ‘thing’ to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity.” (*Deus caritas est*, nr. 5)

<sup>46</sup> The “other” is here understood not in the Sartrean sense as one who necessarily limits my freedom by setting constraints upon me, by objectifying me—that is to say, by directing me according to his own interests—but in the sense of Levinas: as one who remains mystery, and as such awakens my capacity for exchange and thus also, in a certain sense, my freedom.

<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, to address the objective nature of love is to acknowledge not only the objective goodness of the object or of the person loved, but also and especially the fittingness of that object or person *to* or *for me*. Hence, it is possible to speak of one’s loves as either perfecting or degrading with regard to one’s very self. “Nothing is hurt by being adapted to that which is suitable to it,” St. Thomas argues; “rather, if possible, it is perfected and bettered. But if a thing be adapted to that which is not suitable to it, it is hurt and made worse thereby. Consequently love of a suitable good perfects and betters the lover; but love of a good which is unsuitable to the lover, wounds and worsens him.” (*Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 28, a. 6) Even the so-called subjective value of our loves have objective weight from this perspective, which is to say that they might be judged, according to objective criteria, as appropriate to, or befitting, one’s (human) nature.

<sup>48</sup> “In love of concupiscence, the lover is carried out of himself, in a certain sense; in so far, namely, as not being satisfied with enjoying the good that he has, he seeks to enjoy something outside himself. But since he seeks to have this extrinsic good for himself, he does not go out from himself simply, and this movement remains finally within him. On the other hand, in the love of friendship, a man’s affection goes out from itself simply; because he wishes and does good to his friend, by caring and

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providing for him, for his sake.” (*Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 28, a. 3. See also Peter A. Kwasniewski, “St. Thomas, *Extasis*, and the Union with the Beloved,” *The Thomist* 61 [1997], pp. 587-603).

<sup>49</sup> Human love is presented, more specifically, as “a compound of sense and spirit”—bespeaking man’s corporal-spiritual unity—and thus not merely a matter “of natural instinct or emotional drive. It is also, and above all,” Paul VI insists, “an act of the free will”. This (free will) is not, in turn, to be understood—in the spirit of this same document—as an autonomous power, but rather as a God-given faculty in virtue of which one acts, in accord with objective criteria, to achieve one’s human potential—to fulfill oneself as a person—and at the same time to contribute to the good of the other. “Whoever really loves his partner” does so, *Humanae vitae* teaches us, “not only for what he receives, but loves that partner for her own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself.” (*Humanae vitae*, nr. 9).

<sup>50</sup> See, most especially, his famous theology of the body: *Man and Woman He Created Them* (*op. cit.*)

<sup>51</sup> “Every agent acts for an end... Now the end is the good desired and loved by each one. Wherefore it is evident that every agent, whatever it be, does every action from love of some kind.” (*Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 28, a. 6)

<sup>52</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> Every love is transient: it is ordered by necessity to an object other than the lover himself. This act of being drawn out of oneself need not, however, be understood as elevating, for I might be degraded by a love whose object is unsuitable to my own nature, as St. Thomas argues (see *supra*, nr. 46), or in the positive sense of a love that entails a kenotic movement of sacrifice: an authentic giving of oneself. Especially in this second sense, the transient character might take on the specific form of immanence, that is to say, the giving of oneself in such a way as to receive the other: the giving that means making room for the reception of the other’s self gift: a reception which requires—given the nature of the gift as personal—a personalist response: the gift of one’s very self. See *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 29.

<sup>54</sup> General audience of January 2, 1980 ; nr. 2; in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 182. Similarly: “Human life is by its nature ‘co-educational’ and its dignity as well as its balance depend at every moment of history and in every place of geographic longitude and latitude on ‘who’ she shall be for him and he for her.” (General audience of October 8, 1980; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 301); “In the [original] ‘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.’*” (*Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 7)

<sup>55</sup> Saiving, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on

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earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2: 3-11)

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Kerry Ramsay, “Losing One’s Life for Others: Self-Sacrifice Revisited” in *Challenging Women’s Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith*, edited by Susan Frank Parsons (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 121-33, and Sarah Coakley, “Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of ‘Vulnerability’ in Christian Feminist Writing” in *idem*, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 3-39. Coakley also makes reference to the very influential Rosemarie Radford Ruether (*Sexism and God-Talk* [London: SCM Press, 1983], pp. 137-38) as likewise defending this notion. Tina Beattie, combining the insights of Saiving and Coakley argues: “The problem that feminists of faith must negotiate is that, without some form of the giving of self in prayer and in human relationships, the modern, autonomous subject remains the foundation upon which the postmodernist self constructs its ostensibly deconstructive parodies and performances. (...) The challenge is to discover a way of being that preserves the fragile sense of self that women are beginning to acquire in modern culture, while allowing that self to willingly abandon herself to God in the confidence that this God is an Other who participates in our personal becoming and makes us more rather than less the selves we seek to be.” (*New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* [London & New York: Routledge, 2006], pp. 72, 73)

<sup>58</sup> This in turn requires that we admit the important, typically Catholic, distinction between objective and subjective redemption: between, that is to say, Christ’s salvific act “for us all” (cf. 1 Tim 2:6) and each one’s personal appropriation of his merits on our behalf.

<sup>59</sup> As Giorgio Buccellati puts it with regard to the Christian’s relation to Christ: “I yield to affirm.” (“Religious Vows and the Structure of Love,” *Communio* 23(1996), p. 562.

<sup>60</sup> On this see, Michele M. Schumacher, “Toward a Spirituality of Poverty,” *Nova et vetera* 3,2 (Spring 2005): 217-230, especially 221-226.

<sup>61</sup> *Confessions* I, 1.

<sup>62</sup> “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

<sup>63</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), p. 128.

<sup>64</sup> “In Christian faith alone, then—to say it once more—lies the single sufficient explanation for human existence.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 130-31). See also his *A Theological Anthropology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), pp. 312-13

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, nr. 24 and *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 7.

<sup>66</sup> Karol Wojtyła, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in *idem*, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, translated by Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York/ San Francisco/ Bern, etc.: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 194.

<sup>67</sup> Karol Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community” in *idem*, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, translated by Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York/ San Francisco/ Bern, etc.: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 242-43.

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<sup>68</sup> “The man’s solitude in the Yahwist account presents itself to us not only as the first discovery of the characteristic transcendence proper to the person, but also as the discovery of an adequate relation ‘to’ the person, and thus as opening toward and waiting for a ‘communion of persons’.” (General audience of November 14, 1979, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 162)

<sup>69</sup> General audience of November 14, 1979; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, pp. 161-62. “While Genesis 1,” he continues, “expresses this value in a purely theological (and indirectly metaphysical) form, Genesis 2, by contrast, *reveals, so to speak, the first circle of experience lived by man as a value.*” (ibid., p. 162)

<sup>70</sup> General audience of October 8, 1980; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 301.

<sup>71</sup> See *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 7,

<sup>72</sup> See John Paul II’s general audience of October 8, 1980; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 301; cf. *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 14. “Only a person can love and only a person can be loved. This statement is primarily ontological in nature, and it gives rise to an ethical affirmation. Love is an ontological and ethical requirement of the person. The person must be loved, since love alone corresponds to what the person is.” (*Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 29) It is not surprising, then, that Michael Waldstein recognizes already in the pre-papal writings of John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła) “the truth about the human person” and “the heart of the individual drama of our lives” presented as “the history of love or its negation.” (Introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 143). For a very thorough philosophical analysis of this ethical and ontological concept, see Kenneth Schmitz, “Selves or Persons: A Difference in Loves?,” *Communio* 18 (Summer, 1991): 183-206.

<sup>73</sup> “To receive someone, a guest for example, is popularly understood as offering him or her hospitality, welcoming him into one’s home, sharing what one *has*; but there is also a deeper, more intimate meaning which aims at an authentic communion of persons. In this second sense, one may be said to communicate who one *is*, to give one’s very self, but in such a way as to simultaneously welcome the other’s self-gift, as when a woman is said to ‘receive’ in the sexual embrace the man who loves her in giving himself. When this ‘other’ is the Lord, the receptive act implies both *surrender* and *devotion* as are simultaneously evoked by the German term *Hingabe*. In Scripture, the two forms of receptivity are perhaps best modeled by Martha, the busy hostess, and Mary, the quiet contemplative who has chosen ‘the one thing needful,’ ‘the better part’ (Lk 10:42). Like that other Mary, most ‘blessed among women,’ she receives Christ, not merely as visitor but as Lord; not just in her home, but in her heart.” (“Michele M. Schumacher, “Toward a Spirituality of Poverty,” *Nova et Vetera* [English Edition] 3,2 [Spring 2005], p. 225).

<sup>74</sup> Saiving, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, p. 75.

<sup>76</sup> This explains, she adds, why women are “naturally” assigned the principal share of educating children. See *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>77</sup> See *Mulieris dignitatem*, nrs. 30, 31; Idem, *Letter to Women* on the occasion of the Beijing Conference, *Origins: CNS Documentary Services* vol. 25, nr. 9 (July 27, 1995), nr. 9, p. 141; idem, *Christifideles Laici*, nr. 51; Encyclical Letter on the Gospel of Life, *Evangelium vitae* (March 25,

1995), nr. 99; and Michele M. Schumacher, “The Prophetic Vocation of Women and the Order of Love” in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 2:2 (Spring 1999): 147-192.

<sup>78</sup> See Paul Quay, chapter 3 of *idem*, *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985). This typically masculine character trait stands in contrast to women’s typically *sentimental* disposition. See Mary Shivanandan, *op. cit.* On the risk of non-reciprocated love, see Kenneth Schmitz’s analysis of a gift that is not received, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982), pp. 48-49.

<sup>79</sup> This is the English title that is given to the second essay in the English collection of her works on women (*op. cit.*). Emphasis mine. The original German is more accurately translated as simply: “The vocation of man and woman according to the order of nature and grace” (*Beruf des Mannes und der Frau nach Natur- und Gnadenordnung*). See *Die Frau. Fragestellungen und Reflexionen*, volume 13 of *Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2000): 56-78.

<sup>80</sup> “God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.” (John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation on “The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World,” *Familiaris consortio* [November 22, 1981], nr. 11). It is perhaps worth noting that Hans Urs von Balthasar recognizes in the reciprocity of man and woman “a paradigm of that community dimension which characterizes man’s entire nature.” (*Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, Vol. II: *Dramatic Personae: Man in God*, translated by Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992], p. 365). See also Margaret Mc Carthy, *op. cit.*

<sup>81</sup> See *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 14.

<sup>82</sup> “Ours are, as John Paul II teaches, “two complementary dimensions of self-knowledge and self-determination, and at the same time, *two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body*. Thus, as Genesis 2:3 already shows, femininity in some way finds itself before masculinity, while masculinity confirms itself through femininity. (...) The presence of the feminine element, next to the masculine and together with it, signifies an enrichment for man in the whole perspective of his history, including the history of salvation.” (General Audience of November 21, 1979 in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 166) Similarly, but from a more objective perspective than that of self-knowledge, he notes: “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.’” (*Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 22) This insight is complementary to that of Paul Evdokimov: “The more man and woman each deepen their *own* type, and do so not in isolation but in archetypal reciprocity, the closer they come to fully assimilating their counterpart’s positive core, and thus arrive at their *own truth*.” (*Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, translated by Anthony P. Gythiel [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994], p. 250). Even more insightful is the argument of Margaret Mc Carthy who maintains that sexual difference is what accounts for the placing of nuptial love at “front and center” of the Christian tradition: “as the first and paradigmatic expression of love among other loves” (and in this regard we need only mention Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, nr. 11): “[T]he movement towards the opposite sex is never the movement of a mere aspect of oneself nor a movement towards a mere aspect of the other; it is, rather, a movement of and towards a particularity in which the whole of his or her humanity is expressed.”

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For this reason, she explains that “the movement towards the opposite sex is not *per se* a love of the other *per accidens*, whereby the other person is reduced to an object for the one loving (even if this is abundantly possible when sexual difference *is* taken to be a mere aspect of one’s humanity and not the vehicle of its manifestation). It is rather the possibility of an affirmation of the good of the other as other, that is, of his or her (similar) humanity which always exists bodily in a different manner. This possibility is moreover the possibility of one’s own fulfillment, for here one encounters ‘another self’ not only because by seeing in the other a common humanity (or some other similarity) one identifies with the other, and so extends his love for himself thereby expanding his own good (now a larger common good), but also because by associating with this other in his or her difference and leaving one’s former place, so to speak, to be resituated, one now has one-self—one now has one’s ‘body’—all the more and is more at home.” (McCarthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 267, 294)

<sup>83</sup> Hence, for example, a woman would try to imitate the masculine qualities of her husband and he of his wife, so that both might arrive somewhere in between the typically male and the typically female.

<sup>84</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, “‘Thank Heaven for Little Girls’: The Dialectics of Development,” in *The Family in Political Thought*, edited by idem (Brighton, Sussex, England: The Harvest Press, 1982), p. 299.

<sup>85</sup> Such is the case of C.S. Lewis’ “Mrs Fidget”: “For Mrs. Fidget, as she so often said, would ‘work her fingers to the bone’ for her family. They couldn’t stop her. Nor could they—being decent people—quite sit still and watch her do it. They had to help. Indeed they were always having to help. That is, they did things for her to help her to do things for them which they didn’t want done.” Such, Lewis explains, is a form of gift-love, “but one that needs to be needed. But the proper aim of giving is to put the recipient in a state where he no longer needs our gift.” (*The Four Loves*, p. 50)

<sup>86</sup> For a treatment of these three aspects of every woman’s character structure (human, feminine and personal) as it is presented in the thought of Edith Stein, see Sibylle von Streng, “Woman’s Threefold Vocation according to Edith Stein,” in *Women in Christ*, 105-138. In that which concerns the dynamic between the innate and the acquired aspects of femininity, see Michele M. Schumacher, “The Nature of Nature in Feminism, Old and New,” *op. cit.*

<sup>87</sup> “The Bridegroom,” explains John Paul II, with reference to Ephesians 5, “is the one who loves. The Bride is loved: *it is she who receives love, in order to love in return.*” (*Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 29). It is extremely important that these words by John Paul II be read for what they are: not a further effort of the church to submit women to male dominance, but a personalist insistence that “the dignity of women” be “measured by the order of love, which is essentially the order of justice and charity.” (*Ibid.*) Indeed, far from arguing for the subjection of women to their husbands (cf. Pius XI, *Casti connubi*, nr. 15), John Paul II insists upon the “mutual subjection” of the spouses “out of reverence for Christ” (cf. Eph 5:21) “and not just that of the wife to the husband.” This, he teaches, is a specific “Gospel innovation” that “must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behaviour and customs” (*Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 24). For a thorough treatment of this notion of “the order of love” in *Mulieris dignitatem*, see Michele M. Schumacher, “The Prophetic Vocation of Women and the Order of Love” in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 2:2 (Spring 1999): 147-192.

<sup>88</sup> Helpful for this analysis might be Kenneth Schmitz’s treatment of receptivity as conditioning giving: “What is a gift? It is a free endowment upon another who receives it freely.” (*The Gift*, p. 44) “Despite the absolute gratuity inherent in the gift as endowment, reciprocity is appropriate to the gift.

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A gift is meant to be reciprocated. The fundamental reciprocity called for, however, is not the return of another gift. It is rather the completion of the gift being given.” It must, in other words, be received. (*Ibid.*, p. 47)

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Mulieris dignitatem*, nr. 29 (cited in note 72 above); and *Redemptoris hominis*, nr. 10.

<sup>90</sup> General Audience of November 21, 1979; *Man and Woman He Created Them*, p. 166.

<sup>91</sup> See *Evangelium vitae*, nr. 99.

<sup>92</sup> She is not, in other words, simply his mistress, but truly his partner in the sense described by the second chapter of Genesis, especially v. 23.

<sup>93</sup> “[B]oth claim universality,” he continues, “but what they portray is only a personal *apartheid* or a collective *party*.” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *In the Fullness of Faith: On the Centrality of the Distinctively Catholic*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988], p. 44. For a critique of the individualism that has deeply infected feminist thought itself, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Cahpel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>94</sup> *Deus caritas est*, nr. 6.