

A FOOTING ON THE PLAIN

Scripture and Woman

Book Three

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1 SPIRITUALITY ENMESHED WITH GENDER LANGUAGE

In these days when pressure increases to make Scripture wholly accessible to people with keen feministic sensibilities, whatever can be done with the following story? It is an important question because the gender meanings in this story are fundamental to the spirituality of the whole Bible, New Testament as well as Old.

There was a man living in Bible times who struggled through a heart-rending marriage to a prostitute, oddly enough a marriage God himself had proposed. Because of Hosea's faithfulness to what he heard the Lord say, his words were recorded and have come down to us in the Old Testament in the form of a book of prophecy called "Hosea." Here he relates that when the Lord first spoke to him it was in these enigmatic words

"Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits a great harlotry by forsaking the LORD" (Hos 1:2)

Why would the God of the universe ask a man who loved him to do such a thing? A woman like Gomer would be considered impure by his fellow Israelites. Thus what benefit could such a union be either to the prophet, or to his children, or to the people God was speaking to through Hosea? It is not as though Gomer had reformed her ways. Rather, she was still addicted to her way of life, and leaving her husband and their three children sold herself again into its slavery. Hosea sought her out from the pagan cult where she plied her trade, buying her back for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a letchech of barley. This time he spoke to her;

"You must dwell as mine for many days, you shall not play the harlot, or belong to another man, so will I also be to you." (Hos 3:2-4)

Hosea might pledge faithfulness to Gomer, but faithfulness was not anything that Gomer valued or care to live. God knew in bringing her into Hosea's life that the good man would not be able to inspire her to a new and holier life. He knew that she would stubbornly cling to her old friends at the cult site, that she would only half-heartedly care for their children and that her attitude to him, rather than gratitude, would be sullen resentment. Why then had God commanded this peculiar union?

The times of Hosea and Gomer were fraught with grave temptations for the people whom God had chosen to be his own. The Israelites more often than not succumbed. Through their descendant, Jesus, God meant these very people to bring blessing to the whole world (800 years in the future), yet at this point they were enamored by pagan gods and goddesses. The bottom-drawer religion of Baal and Ashtaroth was a simple one, easy to understand and compatible to the raw human nature. If a farmer wanted to be sure of adequate rains for a good harvest, he merely

visited the local cult prostitute and Baal would fertilize his fields. No strict moral precepts, no demanding spiritual comprehension such as Yahweh required were demanded by Baal; it was a wholly animalistic transaction. Sexual union was involved, both in the actual “worship” and in the concept of a fruitful yield from the soil. But God cried out his anguish that the people chosen to be ‘holy as God is holy,’ those wedded to him in the intense promises of Covenant, forgot him, ignored his love and went after false gods.

While his own people praised the gold-headed god Baal and his mistress Ashtaroth for their provision, all the bounty actually came from the hand of Yahweh who was ignored.

“And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Baal.” (Hos 2:8)

How would God express to Israel the depths of his anguish at their betrayal? He would ask that faithful man Hosea, the one who heeded the covenant and obeyed his Word, to be the walking witness of his own intense feelings. Yahweh was Israel’s husband; he recalled the days when he had wooed her as a bride during forty years in the wilderness. He had taught her from the first that “Covenant” was marriage, that he was her Provider, Lover, and Husband. He would again bring her to the desert wilderness “and speak tenderly to her.” But he must catch her attention.

The people of Israel were used to sexual imagery in thinking of God. Their common way of expressing “knowing” was a sexual term, “yada.” Israelites weren’t conversant with abstract concepts; therefore, in the most concrete of analogies “knowing” to them meant sexual intercourse. The intimate, whole person experience of God, opening to him, allowing him in, was how to “know” him, not merely by exercising the brain. This “yada” knowledge of God was subtle, spiritual, and required differentiation from the Baal imitation with its perverted sexual activity. The demands of the Eternal God upon the people forced them to stretch spiritually in order to comprehend things too wonderful for them. The Baals, on the other hand, encouraged retrogression to the lowest common denominator of human capability.

Baal had a consort in Baal-heaven, and his relations with Ashtaroth were aped in false worship in the temples of Baal. True, a man transcended himself in the sex act, and in union with Baal’s female priestesses Baal would be encouraged to bring forth from the earth the oil, the wine and the grain.

The only true God, however, had no heavenly consort. Instead, he founded the family of Abraham. He promised him and his descendants that they would be his people and he would be their God. Their knowledge of him in this intimate union would be “yada.” His intimate love was meant for them alone and not for any heavenly goddess.

The exercise of sexual intimacy of man and woman in Israel was then, surrounded with a “hedge of thorn.” They will be prohibited from adultery or from union with prostitutes because their sexual union was on the same order as the holiest of all relationship, the union of God and his people. The Old Testament poetry of Song of Solomon inspired many of the saints to extend that understanding to mean the union of God and the individual soul. Sexual purity or fidelity to a marriage partner was in a most important sense linked to a man or woman’s relationship to God. If they were not faithful to the marriage partner to whom they had vowed lifetime fidelity, there

was not only serious betrayal of their promises to God, but serious doubt of their desire to be eternally his, to be one with him.

Adultery and idolatry had a spiritual affinity that made them inseparable sins. Perhaps, when we abuse and transgress our sexuality, it is this tremendous truth deeply embedded in our unconscious mind that activates the most painful guilt of all guilts. It is a guilt meant to propel us to repentance, forgiveness, and then fidelity - where all our happiness lies.

Such repentance and guilt God meant Hosea to stimulate in the Israelites. Therefore, he was to marry Gomer, name their children with words that would remind Israel of her infidelity to God, and mourn Gomer's transgressions of his faithful love. Thus, in real human flesh and blood, a drama would be enacted that would demonstrate to Israel in a small degree how God's heart was torn by her rejection. Hopefully they would be motivated to return to his love - their happiness.

“And in that day, says the LORD, she will call me, ‘My husband,’ ... For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. . . And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know (yada) the LORD.” (Hos 2:18-21)

When John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the expected bridegroom and when Jesus referred to himself as Bridegroom, the meaning was not lost on the Israelites who heard these words. It was a portentous claim with deep roots in the prophecies of Hosea among others of the prophets. To sweep away the use of the masculine - Husband, Father, Bridegroom - for God, as the inspired writing of the Bible uses it, is to sweep away an essential teaching about God and humankind's relationship, which must, in human terms, be understood as bridegroom to bride, or as masculine to feminine. All souls, whether male or female, are thus regarded in Scripture to be “the beloved” of God who is a Tremendous Lover.

2 THE BIBLE'S INSPIRED USE OF SEXUAL LANGUAGE

In more and more Christian publications a conclusion is reached that was stated by Arthur Shaw¹⁸ in an article for *National Catholic Register* a year ago. That is, that addressing God as male or female is 'not only sowing confusion, but teaching heresy.' The statement as it stands is, of course, true. God is Pure Spirit and has no physical body that is male or female. Yet, a reply to this conclusion about gender language used for God is demanded if some critical truth is not to be totally obscured, because this assertion simply doesn't go far enough. Addressing God with gender language exclusively of one sex is neither confusing or heretical, but correct and true, and is first to be found in the Bible.

To explain that statement the place to begin is at the beginning - that is Genesis 1. There, where it describes God's creation of man and woman in His image, the words are written "let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."¹⁹ Pope John Paul II in the encyclical "Dominum et Vivificantem" writes about this passage, "Can one hold that the plural which the Creator uses here in speaking of himself already in some way suggests the Trinitarian mystery, the presence of the Trinity in the work of the creation of man?"²⁰ Using his logic which in every particular fits the unrolling story of man and woman in the Bible, brings us to some clarifying insights about the meaning of sexuality.

In his Pastoral Letter, "Do This in Memory of Me", Cardinal Carter presents the deep covenantal theology based on the Trinity from which we understand relationships on all levels of being - God and mankind, man and woman, priest and laity. The Cardinal Archbishop's teaching ranges from deductions based on the nature of the Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ, to anthropological considerations drawn from the nature of human sexuality. He begins with an analysis of the Trinity, a community of diverse persons which implies

¹⁸ Arthur Shaw, "Gender Language for God" *National Catholic Register*, November 12, 1989 p,4

¹⁹ Genesis 1:27

²⁰ Pope John Paul II , Encyclical "Dominum et Vivificantem" Pentecost 1986 1:3:12,

neither Lordship nor subjugation of one Person to another, yet with distinct roles, irreducibly different in what concerns their being as distinct Persons.²¹

Within the relationship of the Triune Persons stand revealed an Initiator, the Father; a Dependent Responder, the Son; and unifying these two polar Person (initiation and response are ob-positioned, that is, irrevocably facing one another) is the Holy Spirit, who is as St. Bernard said, “the kiss between the Father and the Son.” Adding insights from the Athanasian Creed, it is possible to conclude: God is a Triune unity: two polar Persons, one Initiator, one Responder united by a Third who is in Himself the Unity of the ob-positioned Persons. Each have all the attributes of the One nature, but some are more to be said of one than the others - “neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance”.

From the union of Father and Son in the Spirit emanates creativity and ecstasy. In creating man and woman, God shares that creativity and ecstasy of His own Being by enfleshing, materializing these awesome principles of personhood in a male who initiates, and a female who is dependent and responds.

Cardinal Carter writes:

This qualitative sexual differentiation is rooted not in physiology but in the created human imaging of the Trinity, and is indissociable from the revelation of the Trinity in Christ, as his Incarnation bears witness.²²

In The Perfection of the Original Plan these two (male and female persons of Mankind) are made in this image: two polar persons sharing one nature - one the initiator, one the responder united by a Third, the Holy Spirit, who condescends to share Himself and unify these opposites with Divine Love. Therefore, the sexuality that appeared in physical form expresses in a creaturely way something utterly spiritual at the heart of things.

God is saying something about His very self in the creation of the man and woman; He is sharing the dynamics of the Personhood in the Trinity with the creature He makes in His Image. Therefore maleness, though not found in the Trinity, of course, speaks nevertheless of what we would intrepidly say is the Masculine Principle among the Persons of the Trinity. How do we come to the idea of “masculine?” By observing the action of the male.

But the male is picturing for us something far beyond himself. Because the male generates, in a secondary way, new life, and because God has revealed Himself as generator of everything that is, it may be anthropomorphic to describe the First Person as Father, but the very idea has come from God down, not from man up. God has spoken about Himself in real terms by creating male and female bodies. Therefore, what has visible form as male imperfectly incarnates a masculine principle in the Trinity. We call the principle “masculine” because of our human experience with maleness - but it precedes maleness and lies at the heart of things. What has visible form as female imperfectly incarnates a feminine principle in the Trinity. We call the principle “feminine” because of our human experience with femaleness - but it precedes any physical femaleness and lies at the heart of things.

²¹ Carter, Gerald Emmett Cardinal, “Do This in Memory of Me.” 8 December 1983

²² *Ibid* p.24

Accordingly, the Second Person in both the Holy Trinity and in Mankind, is the responder. This role for both the Son and the woman is in response to the First/first Person. (Do the Son and the woman have the attribute of initiation? Do the Father and the man have the attribute to respond? Of course, because the polar persons share all attributes of each, but certain attributes are more to be said of one than the other which makes the persons' positions polar and non-exchangeable).

the absolute unity of God is not monadic but trinitarian. This eliminates the necessity of placing antagonisms between unity and multiplicity, because the Triune God, who is Unity itself, is also three Persons, qualitatively differentiated and irreducible to each other, yet without antagonism.²³

In Perfection the "Second/second Person is completely equal in worth to the First/first Person. It is a result of the Fall, the takeover of the scene by an enemy's values, that "response" "dependent" become despised concepts. In the Perfect Plan receiving and responding are values equal to governance and generating. The Second Person is co-equal and co-eternal to the First. Man and woman, created to image that relationship in human flesh, were created with the same polar roles inherent in their flesh and psyche, yet, they stand eye to eye as total equals. As in the Trinity, initiation (or authority) and response (or obedience), indicative of man and woman, are not principles unequal in their value and worth. They are the stances of wholly equal beings, who enjoy an equality like Father and Son.

The very idea of *the inequality* of the role of response came from an alien consciousness, one who had already envied the role of authority and spread that envy to the Perfect creation. When the woman accepted his definition, eventually believing his lies, his value system was established which is the Fall, a value system that still is modus operandi. It took this alien consciousness to cast doubt on that equality and to substitute a value system

which contaminates everything since the Fall. The anti-word (Pope John Paul II's term) corrupts with the lie that to initiate and order is power and power is 'where its at.'

As a corollary, the same anti-word insists that to heed and serve, to receive and respond, is for lackeys and nitwits. Jesus restored the value system of Perfection; in bridging this abyss, he restored the values of the Original Plan - to be obedient is not the least important role, to be authority is not the most important role, but almost no one believes it to this day - least of all the one who most purely is created to model obedience and service, the woman.

Archbishop John Roach recently cast light on this as it refers to laity and clergy to the National Council of Catholic Women.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, but very different. The Father does not do what the Son does, the Son does not do what the Father does and neither does what the Spirit does. Jesus spoke often of doing the Father's will. He wasn't obsequious; that was his role and he recognized the Father's role. The Father did things unique to the Father. He initiates, governs, presides, creates in a very distinctive way. The Son's role is to respond, to be the word for the Father, to reflect the Father, to be the splendor and glory of the Father. The Spirit is the bond of love animating the Father and the Son. He is the comforter and consoler and paraclete and inspiration.

²³ Ibid p.11

That may seem to be a kind of lofty ideal for us, but think it's what we have to aim at. Our roles are different, but that ought to be a source of rejoicing, not resentment. There are things that you do as laity that I shouldn't do. There are things that I do as bishop and priest that you shouldn't do.

There is no inferiority or super-superiority in the Trinity. There can't be any among us. I must exercise a kind of leadership and a kind of authority for the good of the church which is not your responsibility. To do that, however, I must recognize not only the dignity of you as persons and children of God, but as people in whom the Spirit resides and to whom the Spirit speaks. . . In a collegial gathering all bring gifts. The leader becomes servant and the last rises to full dignity. . .²⁴

In order for this vision to catch on, it takes the woman first (beginning with The Blessed Virgin Mary, but we women, too) to revalue her role and meaning in light of the Second Person of the Trinity. That is because woman first accepted Satan's false definition and evaluation of her role; that is, as less worthy than the role of authority her husband held in their relationship by Divine command. Edith Stein says, "the nature of the temptation was in itself of more significance to her."²⁵ The woman must begin the unraveling of the knot by not choosing again the values of Satan, not accepting again the lie that ordering/authority/governance has a higher prestige, is more worthy than service and is, therefore, an object of envy. She must claim her role and love it; and if she must fight, it is to have that role of obedience recognized as fully equal to the opposite role of authority. She is neither a lackey nor a nitwit. Authority will not talk down to her if she talks straight with it, respectfully, but eye to eye.

In order for the value system of Perfection to be restored, woman must accept obedience as fully worthy, fully equal to the opposite role. The Virgin Mary has done it. Women have rarely done it, and the very idea is being washed away in our day. Obedience (submission) has not only been devalued as the feminine role; but authority has been falsely elevated (Satan's values are intact). Therefore the man considers his role as prestigious and powerful; and this worldly, not to say carnal, evaluation is widely endorsed by women. Authority, which is another word for ultimate initiation and governance, must take its clues from the First Person of the Trinity - that is, it exists to put all at the service of those who are receivers/responders. Pope John Paul II's insistence that Ephesians 5 speaks of "mutual submission" of wife to husband and husband to wife underlines this.²⁶ But the submission of both, *the total giving of self*²⁷ that both experience, is done differently. The woman submits to the husband's governance and ordering (the role of headship) of their life together, making one will of two; and the husband submits to the woman's need for protection and provision, and this whether he feels like it or not.

In the Christian community, males have authority, and women model obedience. But both live lives of self-giving service in mutual submission. The laity (feminine though consisting of males and females) submits

²⁴ Roach, Archbishop John, Archbishop of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Eucharistic Celebration, November 9, 1987, National Council of Catholic Women

²⁵ Edith Stein, *The Collected Works*, Volume Two, Essays on Women ICS Publications, Washington, DC, 1987, p.62

²⁶ John Paul II, Pastoral Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1989 p. 91,92,98

²⁷ *Ibid* p. 67,78,84

to the clergy's (masculine) governance, the clergy submits to the laity's need for headship, spiritual and material, whether convenient or inconvenient. Further, the Christian community forms the people of God (the Bride) whose relationship to God is as feminine to masculine. The model? Again, man and woman in marriage; just as man and woman in marriage are the image of the Holy Trinity. This imaging of the meaning of sexuality is not deviated from throughout the Bible despite the different pressures of time and culture in 2000 plus years of its formation.

We see the Model for both roles within the Holy Trinity. There is no prestige in the rote of authority, and no servility in the role of obedience - such is the peculiar Christian vision of relationship. Says Jesus who was sent, "I do nothing but what I see the Father doing." "I have not come of my own accord" etc. Such statements are the core of the Gospel of John.²⁸

What does this mean? It means that maleness and femaleness and the roles inherent in the bodily form speak of ultimate truth about relationship originating in the Holy Trinity. God knows that this creature will develop a language according to information received through the senses. That language will necessarily be anthropomorphic, but because the sexual body, male and female, is created to image the truth, the words developed can be used to express that truth truly.

CS. Lewis in his masterful investigation of the meaning of sexuality in the space-fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength*, writes in the latter,

‘Yes,’ said the Director, There is no escape. If it were a virginal rejection of the male, He would allow it. Such souls can bypass the male and go on to meet something far more masculine, higher up, to which they must make a yet deeper surrender. But your trouble has been what old poets called Daungier, we call it Pride. . . .the masculine none of us can escape. What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it.²⁹

The inspired writers of Holy Scripture, where Lewis gained his insights, will be speaking truly when they reveal God as forever masculine, and mankind in relation to God as forever feminine. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they will never deviate from this form of expression, not once! Examine carefully those scriptures used to present God as mother and the idea will not be found. The importance that God in His Triune Persons be always considered masculine to us human beings is so overwhelming that in every case in Scripture the truth of this is rigorously guarded. It is for this reason, also, that the Second Person of the Trinity came as male - all Persons of the Trinity are as masculine to feminine to us whether we are male or female humans.

Isaiah 66:13ff is the favorite of the misquoted scriptures and is always used in this way: "As nurslings you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you." This, however is the actual context.

Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream, and you shall suck, you shall be carried on her lap and dandled on her knees,

²⁸ The Gospel of John, among many other verses, 5:19,5:26,5:30, 5:37, 5:43, 6:66, 8:28 etc.

²⁹ Lewis, C.S., *That Hideous Strength*, MacMillan, 1964 p.315

As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Obviously God does not present Himself as the mother in this passage. The distinction He places between Himself and Jerusalem is very clear. The same holds true for Isaiah 49:14-15, another favorite attempt to substantiate God's motherhood. "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even if she forgets you, I will never forget you." The speaker is Yahweh, *the Lord*, who in the entire context of Isaiah presents himself as enduringly masculine though with a depth of compassion that surpasses all earthly love, even the love of a mother. Mothers may forget, it's possible, but The Lord will not forget. This Lord continues, "'Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord, your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.'" The very next chapter, the 50th, continues the theme with God identifying Himself as Husband and Father.

Isaiah 46:3-4 is also a standby text for the Mother-God argument, yet there is nothing necessarily maternal in the picture of God carrying the heavy burden which Israel had become. In fact it is explicitly stated in this passage that the one who carries is masculine!

Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and twill bear; I will carry and will save.

Next to Isaiah in frequency, Hosea is often called on to bolster the femininity of God. Such a twist of Hosea's intent cannot be supported by the text in which God speaks throughout as a betrayed husband and deserted father. There is no credence for assuming the speaker in Hosea 11:3-4 is maternal. The Father is expressing warmth and concern as we expect from either parent, mother or father. Nothing maternal is stated here. The actual text, with irrelevant passages deleted, reads:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me . . . Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. . . How can I give you up, O Ephraim? My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy"

Can this be considered to be the Mother-God talking? The context is quite the contrary. Neither can the Sirach reference, "God will love you more than your mother's did," say anything to conclude the femininity of the One who loves more than human mothers. Again the actual wording is:

. . . you will then be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than does your mother.

The Holy Trinity, of course, *ad intra* holds all the positive expressions of relationship that there are. That means that mother-love has its origins in the Holy Trinity. What from mankind's point of view would be called feminine love is present within (*ad intra*) the Trinity, it has been enfolded by the Creator in the woman - the Son is the Person imaged by the woman. Yet, despite the obvious full measure of what we humans call

“femininity” inherent in the Trinity, God will never approach His people as mother or as feminine. To mankind God (ad extra) is consistently Husband, Father, Lover and not Wife, mother or beloved, because Godhead is to Mankind the Initiator, the Author, eliciting Mankind's response and obedience, and the *roles cannot be reversed*.

His People are polar to Himself, and though they are intended to be, in a certain sense, His equals (“Bride without spot or wrinkle.”)³⁰ they can never be God despite Satan's words to the contrary. Yet, they are meant to be joined in union with Him; the Holy Spirit will condescend to His mysterious work, but only after Jesus has come to forgive otherwise indelible sin. His People cannot initiate anything with God, He is the Initiator. They cannot work their way back to union with Him; they are wholly dependent on His action. In relationship to Him they can only receive and respond - as they were created to do, to think God's thoughts after Him and to obey His Holy Will, or if they prefer to exercise their freedom the opposite way, they may think Satan's thoughts after him and do his will.

If God can be presented as mother or as feminine, that is, as receiver and acceptor in the God/Mankind relationship, where does that place His polar people? They are His children, right; but they are growing into His Bride, not His Groom. A feminine God makes them the masculine pole ? - exactly what Satan tempted them to think in the beginning - that they should envy and seize the authority side of the equation and “be like gods.” Already the value of the role of willing obedience has been totally disparaged. It is the Satanic concept that Godhead is merely dominating authoritarianism who lords it over lackeys that has been put in its place.

Thus, the significance of masculine and feminine runs very deep indeed. There is no mother in heaven other than the Blessed Mother, and she is given to us as all the mother we need. There is another heavenly mother, the Church, in that mystical dimension of her that is Holy. It is her overflowing breasts that feed us (Is. 66) and her warm lap that holds us. The only consort of the God who presents Himself as masculine to us is ourselves!

Another aspect of the question that appears more and more frequently in periodicals is the matter of history - the assumption grows that the Hebrews had somehow messed up things and imposed upon the world their perverse patriarchy which they expressed in their sacred writings. Their patriarchal prejudices, declare this reasoning, overpowered the more gentle goddess religions.³¹ We need to look again at that premise in light of the above. Also in light of the goddesses themselves who were not gentle and approachable at all - Tanit, Astarte, or Astaroth demanded child sacrifices, a very bloodthirsty goddess she was - depicted with a lioness head !The others don't stand any kind of scrutiny either. They are projections from the fallen psyche of mankind and cannot stand comparison with the Holy One of Israel, I AM HE!

Therefore, objections to much current writing on God and gender language is legitimate; 1) that it twists Scripture, theology and history, albeit perhaps innocently; 2) that Scripture is not just a human book - it is far too fantastically profound for that, often speaking more than the human author knew or intended. *Dei Verbum* asserts “Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that

³⁰ Ephesians 5:27

³¹ See “Feminine Images of God Can-Inhance Your Prayer and Change Your Life” by Virginia Ann Froehle, R.S.M., St. Anthony Messenger, May 1989. This article blatantly blames the Hebrews for male images of God.

truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.”³² Often those who adhere to this definition are pejoratively called fundamentalists, a word many who are unwilling to take Scripture wholly and seriously use much too freely in order to quiet their questioners. It is necessary to heed literary forms, the times addressed, the exact meaning of words in their contexts, and ways of perception of the times. But none of this negates the statement above which transcends all of the human aspects of scripture - that God has seen to it that this Book speaks what He wants us to know sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind . . .³³ That in the matter of sexuality in scripture we are we are not working with mere metaphor, we are working with an analogy. That is, there is a very close parallel in comparison of the three Triune Relationships, and the sexual designations made in each tier of relationship speak the truth. An analogy points up a relationship between two things - a real parallelism of character, or attributes. Therefore, to say that man and woman and their relationship is an analogy of God's relationship to Mankind is to say that there is a real parallel in the comparison that rests in verity. In this case because God has created the one (Mankind) to be a sign of the other (God). A metaphor, on the other hand, merely suggests a likeness in some particular about two very unlike things. For instance, “That dog walks like a turtle.” Feminine references to Godhead in scripture can be seen with little effort to be sheer metaphors. When Jesus said that he was like a hen wanting to gather his chicks he was speaking in metaphor - he didn't resemble a chicken in any regard other than this one particular. But when he said He and the Father are One he was not speaking metaphor at all - either about Father, which I have explained above, or about their oneness.

In this matter of gender language for God, and the meaning of male and female, many people are being swept by something that they do not understand, and are taking up the mistaken values of feminism about authority/submission, so they are constantly tempted to envy the masculine side and thereby cast aside the beauty and wholeness of Jesus' way of abject obedience, saying it does not behoove women to be obedient, and don't use that word, “submission.” All of this is a serious concern to the Church as we enter the Third Millennium, it is of serious concern because it lies at the center of what it means to be a Catholic Christian, it is sifting those who have the heart for it from those who do not, and will eventually be seen to vindicate the Church's assertion that the Holy Spirit is “lead(ing) her to perfect union with her Spouse.”.

32Vatican II Dei Verbum, 1965 III:11

33 Ibid III:12

34 Vatican II Lumen Gentium, 1964, 1:4. (footnote refers to St. Iraneus.)

32

33

3 THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS: A SCRIPTURAL LOOK

“Who day and night must scramble for a living, feed the wife and children, say his daily prayers; who has the right as master of the house to have the final word at home? The Papa, the Papa. Who knows the way to make a proper home, a quiet home, a kosher home, and who must raise the family and run the home so Papa’s free to read the Holy Book? The Mama, the Mama.”

With these lyrics *Fiddler on the Roof* begins with a delightful sequence of dance and music extolling the traditions of the Jews. The roots of these traditions are carried in the papas and the mamas, each of whom has a well defined area of contribution to the communal traditions.

It is patriarchy that is described in this song. That is a system of organization where descent and succession, as well as authority, are traced through the fathers. This organization assumes the papas to be the providers and protectors, and the mamas to yield to that protection and provision.

Patriarchy is a strong strain in the Judeo-Christian tradition and is now vigorously attacked as synonymous with injustice and oppression. Feminist theologians finding it throughout the Scriptures are finding the Bible “hopelessly sexist” and some have abandoned it as a basis for their religion. Others would not go so far, but are apologetic when it comes to Scripture’s approach to gender which they believe reveals a cultural bias against women that is more than embarrassing. It is negative, regressive, and cruel. Upon this conviction they have undertaken the necessary work to change the sexual terminology in liturgical prayers and in Scripture to inclusive non-sex discriminating language with the stated goal of “redirecting patriarchal structures in the Church to collegial structures inclusive of men and women.”

This brings up many questions. How does the Bible view man and woman? Does it see them in a way detrimental to either or both of these persons in terms of the modern concepts of freedom and equality? Does the Holy Scripture simply accept an immature idea of sexual dominance and subjection, or is there something more at the heart of patriarchy? Is it really separable from the Truth the Bible proclaims?

In other words, when we read specific passages referring to male and female roles, can it still be said with any level of belief, “This is the Word of God?” And can we still reply to the reading, “Thanks be to God” without hypocrisy?

The only one place to start our short investigation of these questions is at the very beginning of the Bible - the twenty-seventh verse of the first chapter of Genesis. Here the sacred author describes the creation of man and woman. From the context and from the Hebrew it is obvious that “man” here is the generic term for mankind.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

The image of God has many facets, but one of those and certainly not the least is of a Triune Unity. In this Unity two equal Persons are joined by a third equal Person into a perfect Oneness. In this image, man and woman are created as equal persons also joined by God to image Himself - a perfect oneness. In the following verses both male and female together, are given dominion over creation. This is the large *overview* vision of their creation and meaning.

The second telling of the creation of man and woman is a close-up of one specific aspect of the previous overview and gives us important information also relative to the Trinity. It is found in Genesis 2:18ff. Here the Holy Spirit has given us, in picture language, the truth that the woman proceeds from, and is, therefore, dependent upon and under the authority of the man. In just the same way, the creeds proclaim “the Son proceeds from the Father” and is, therefore, dependent upon him for his being. Man and woman are created to image this reality of Godhead. Because of this procession they share in the ecstasy and creativity of the Divine Persons. The order of *a first and a second* does not infer superiority or inferiority, nor does it mean that one member of the union ever exists without the other.

This is the perfect relationship - that the papa be the authority and the initiator like God the Father, and the mama be responsive and obedient to that initiation and authorizing like God the Son. In our fallen world, time bound as it is, these kinds of ideas cause all kinds of trouble. But we remember that this ideal relationship was established before there was the darkness of sin, before creation lost its innocence and happiness. God is so committed to this kind of ordering and its possibilities (it is part and parcel of His nature), that he replicated it from Himself to this human being made in two persons, male and female. One being - male and female united by God; just like Himself - Father and Son united by the Holy Spirit.

In both combinations, the second person *heeds* the first. This was a beautiful thing for man and woman before the entrance of sin. It meant one will for the two of them by the willing gift of the second to the first, and so it was perfect unity. And its driving force was pure love. This love was a whole and holy concern for the other Person that came before all concern for self. Therefore, of course, there was no dissembling, no prestige, and no power plays. By providing order the First person served the Second in the Trinity, and by providing order the first person served the second in the human unity.

In our understanding now - all clouded by bad ideas of authority (those who lord it over others, who abuse power, who aggrandize themselves), and even worse ideas of obedience, (those who cower, and dissemble, and manipulate) - we find it very difficult to believe that ordering and yielding to order was ever in the perfect divine plan. But when you stop and think about it a minute, it is obvious - happiness on earth depends on such divine

ordering. God made the world. He alone knows how it should run. He, therefore, as author is the authorizer. Creation needs to obey this authority or it certainly can't be happy.

When you buy a computer you depend on a manual; to devise your own would be folly. You meet impossible frustration unless you are willing to study and follow the manual the manufacturers have written for you. Silly to cry, "unfair" about that kind of command which is just an ordering guaranteed to have things run smoothly! Yet, that is how the inspired myth tells us this world was brought to disorder. We were taught to hate the manual, and thought we could devise a better one that would put us in the center, and put God on the periphery, some place out of our way. In consistent logic, the woman is seen to be a key to this disordering, not because of her stupidity or flawed moral makeup, but because she is the primary one to epitomize a yielded will. Therefore to really break the order apart she had to be the first one to step out of it. That was why the Enemy took her on as the one to win to his way of looking at things. The ways of Satan John Milton has caught with the simple phrase, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven."

It's very hard to imagine how it was when man and woman imaged the Triune Unity before the disordering, but we must try because it that image which we are meant to regain. We have help in imagining it by seeing Jesus in the gospel.

Jesus came to make a way for us to regain that image. He did it by example. He, the obedient one in his own perfect union of Persons demonstrates to us women in our individual unions, how to be perfectly yielded, perfectly submitted to another's will. And because all mankind, man and woman, is to be in that *same kind of relationship* to God, he showed men, too, how to be meek and obedient to godly authority. And all this with wholeness, dignity, and grace, without destroying equality of worth, but rather enhancing that equality.

He made it possible for us to follow his example by dying for our sin negating forever the strong trait of disobedience to God and his order. Without this salvation we are determined to center our lives in ourselves. Added to that we are perfectly sure that no one can control situations like we can. For this deep seated and chronic sin, he died. It's all over now - we are free to follow the model, Jesus, and to regain our original posture, that of a receiver and acceptor, obedient ones. It is thus that we may enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

That's the vision that the Bible has of woman - she's the constant reminder of the whole idea. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." The word of God sees in her, even in her fallen state, a sign of the original plan. Even though she is smudged and disheveled, even though her submission is grudging and sometimes almost non-existent, her physical form still proclaims a message. That message is, "The posture of receptivity toward the other, submission to the other is rewarded with fruitfulness." In her union with her husband who is her other, she is a sign which points to a higher submission for all mankind, and a higher fruitfulness. It was this that Jesus used for a criteria when he said, "Thus you will know them by their fruits."

Her signness points the direction to fulfillment of mankind's potential on this earth - mankind's other is God, himself. Mankind longs and strives to be creative and fruitful, tries to do it alone, and reaps only thorns and bitter imitations of fruit. The People of God are meant to be the spouse of God, and in yielding to God they will find their true meaning and fruitfulness.

It is this analogy that is played out throughout the Bible. It is true as the feminist theologians say, the Bible cannot be rid of its sexist notions. To cut them out would be to strip the Bible of coherent meaning. Each story, every instruction, every song of praise, and poem of wonder is rooted in the truth that mankind in order to be happy must submit to God even as a wife submits to her husband. And from this submission comes blessed fruit, progeny, yes, but also creative dominion over all nature and spiritual fruits of love.

Not only are the papas and mamas of Scripture designated for their sexual roles for their own happiness but these are emblematic of their relationship to God. The truth of this is inseparably interwoven into the Scriptural text, so much so that even the language used is determinedly sexual. The Hebrew idea of “knowing God” is bound into the concept of sexual intercourse by the sharing of the word “yada” for both ideas. There is no way of reversing the action between man and woman in their sexual union, and this same irreversibility is found in the notion of “knowing God.” We may know him, not by intellectual efforts on our part, but only by opening ourselves to him and receiving him into our personal experience. As “Adam knew Eve, and she conceived” so we may know God. Such a truth makes Jesus’ statement in the Sermon on the Mount very telling, indeed, and a fitting statement for the bridegroom to make to those who pay him lip service but never receive him, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

It is indelibly scriptural that Salvation history is rooted in the Patriarchs. To each of them in turn God united one woman, a special woman, for the continuance of His People. Even though culturally they were men who had more than one wife, when we read these stories carefully, we see that they were united specially with one particular woman - *the* woman, whom God has chosen as the mother of the next generation of the faithful. Each of these special women is designated by an amazing sign - she is barren -Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel. To be made fruitful they must submit physically to their husbands, that’s evident, but a Third Person is necessary, God himself, who will work the miracle he has promised in the woman. Man may receive the external authority to order society and religious practice, but the miracle that will overcome all barriers to the continuation of God’s people will be done in woman by God’s own intimate action. The Bible is unwavering in its portrayal of the feminine and masculine ideal.

The three books of the Bible named for women, Ruth, Esther, and Judith, each deal with a different aspect of the feminine response to authority. The first, Ruth, was the faithful woman made fruitful by God to bridge his people from anarchy to godly authority - from the chaos of the time of the Judges, to the reign of King David. Esther demonstrates how an obedient people deal with legal, God-given governance that does not, however, heed God’s law.

Feminine response does not require weakness or apathy in the face of evil. When governance is not authorized by God, and is opposed to the reign of God, there is a special problem. Judith, representative of an obedient and faithful people, and therefore necessarily a woman, becomes the model who bravely undertakes the task of deliverance from evil, even as Mary, whom Judith foreshadows.

The New Testament continues this witness to the meaning of male and female. Though in baptism there is neither male or female (Gal 3: 28), both receive the same gift of salvation, nevertheless both go on living out their maleness and femaleness, they do not become neutered. Freedom from the law given by faith in Jesus, cannot mean freedom from carrying out the inherent meaning of sexuality.

For that reason and not because they are sexist, the apostles are worried over developments in some of the Christian churches. The Holy Spirit effectively changed both St. Peter and St. Paul when they held religious and cultural ideas incompatible with the reign of God. Any sexual prejudice would not have been an obstacle to the Spirit if he had needed to change their concepts of male and female roles. Instead, St. Paul with full apostolic authority declares that women are to be subordinate in church affairs, that this is decent and orderly, and that those who do not agree with this command of the Lord are not to be recognized. (See I Cor. 14:34 if). Such a strong statement is very offensive to those who do not understand the essential sign that woman is in the community - a sign whose message is "The attitude of receptivity toward the other, submission to the *other* is rewarded with fruitfulness."

If the woman devalues this role, leaves it, and tries to take up the masculine role of authorizing, how will the community eventually become the spotless bride of Christ, whose perfect relationship to that Divine spouse is summed up in her living out her opposite signness? And whose values has she accepted? Surely not God's. The Tempter would have won again!

Thank God we have been promised that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church. But that doesn't mean they won't or aren't trying to prevail. They are; and perhaps in the very moves against the meaning of the mamas and the papas and their traditions, perhaps in the very insistence on an inclusive language which will remove all the signs sexuality is meant to convey about God's ordering of his creation.

Regardless of whether we agree with this assessment, an important question remains. Where can we find the authority to change words and concepts in Scripture to suit a culture that cannot be said to be more God-centered than the culture out of which they came? It may after all be our twisted thinking not theirs that is the problem.

4 THE FRUITFUL WOMAN OF GENESIS

Genesis, the first book in the Bible, tells us that when God began to form a People to be his own he chose a very peculiar couple. The man believed in his right to more than one woman, also the right to barter this first wife into the harems of others for certain privileges. The woman herself was barren.

From such an unpropitious start, the stories describe how God began to lay down with inimitable teaching enmeshed with life, a series of principles that would not only begin His self-revelation, but would also disclose the meaning of being human to all who accepted revealed truth.

Abraham is the first character in the Bible that we can confidently place in time and space. The places that this one visited in his wanderings, the spots under terebinths where he staked his tents, the hills whose grasses nourished his flocks are still known to us. Names linked with his have appeared in the written records unearthed at Ebla, an archeological site dating back 4000 years. A Semite family like his and from his time has been found painted in glowing colors on one of the Egyptian tombs - a depiction of shepherd wanderers who had come into Egypt in response to drought in their own lands, just as Abraham had. Certain valued traits and traditions developed in the Semitic shepherd families wandering freely under the sun, and tenting freely under the stars. God found in them a more malleable raw material for his great work than the cultures that had settled down to an agrarian life under the control of priests and governments.

Abraham was the man God chose to begin the awesome task of bringing back the human race into union with Himself. Like his racial kin he had useable concepts that God would infuse with revealed knowledge. He believed in the power of the word - a word that went out from the mouth of authority had the power to accomplish the thing for which it was sent. A blessing brought a blessing, and a curse a curse. Surely God's word would be no less! Words were not the clutter of syllables that meaninglessly impinge upon the modern man.

Abraham, therefore, took seriously a name which partook of the very essence of the thing or of the person. It might indeed form the person when it was given in a prophetic way, but it spoke to all who heard it, the very nature of the person's being. When God would reveal his own name, it would blast away all naturally conceived ideas of 'god' held by Abraham's descendents and does to the present day - The Existing, Subsisting One - "I AM WHO AM."

This man accepted what nature and his unconscious mind told him was absolute, that the senior male was the head of the traveling family group or tribe and he took this responsibility to lead well, provide well, and protect

well, and this was related to the God who began to communicate with him in very special ways, but not to his wife in the same way. This patriarchy was a reflection in him of a purer creation - the one God had meant originally - though now it was deformed as all creation was deformed by self-will which refused the purpose of its Maker.

Upon this shadow of original perfection God would build the People whom he would commission to carry the light of Truth to the ends of the world. Part of this parcel of already held notions and practices held by Abraham as a Semite shepherd was the reverence for blood, and the use of sacrifice and altar. Each of these God would find a fitting reference point from which to build a continuum of understanding which would culminate in a final Sacrifice whose Blood which would finally reestablish union between God and man.

But among all the traits and traditions of that ancient man the most important building block for building a Salvation History was already in place in his wife - his *barren* wife. That essential element was her keen desire, a desire she shared with all her Semite sisters, to be fruitful. There was no doubt in her mind that a sign of God's favor was child-bearing. An ancient story known by heart rang as true in her soul as it does in the soul of the modern believer.

Pope John Paul II has had this to say about the very same story. "A non-Catholic philosopher once said to me, 'You know I just can't stop myself reading and re-reading and thinking over the first three chapters of Genesis.' And indeed, it seems to me that unless one does so reflect upon that fundamental ensemble of facts and situations it becomes extremely difficult -if not impossible -to understand man and the world. It may sound a trifle strange, but I think it is true, that today one cannot understand either Sartre or Marx without having first read and pondered very deeply the first three chapters of Genesis. These are the key to understanding the world today both in its roots, and its extremely radical and therefore dramatic affirmations and denials."(Wojtyla, Karol, Sign of Contradiction p. 23-24 Crossroads, Seabury 1979).

Sarah knew that woman was within that "key" a key. Though woman had been the first to be tempted and induced to evil, it was not that she had a greater inclination, but as Edith Stein points out, "that the nature of the temptation was in itself of greater significance for her." (Stein, Edith, "Vocations of Man and Woman," Woman Collected Works of Edith Stein. Vol II p. 62 IOS Publications 1987) It was upon woman's continued acceptance of the role of pure acceptance that all perfection hung in balance. And once that acceptance was denied with cataclysmic results, it was told that perfection would be reinstated through woman's seed. Woman's seed! Not man's. How strange. Then why did God chose as his starting couple a woman whose seed was infertile? And stranger still, a man who thought just any woman would do.

God obviously did not think so! Abraham sent Sarah off into harems twice. The first time she was over eighty but so beautiful that the Pharaoh took her into his bevy of women. Abraham let her go because he thought his life was in danger - it was no big thing, this woman. Another woman could take her place in his life. God overruled him. He inflicted Pharaoh's house with great plagues until the king got the point - Sarah was not to be his. She was returned, we assume uncompromised, and Abraham came out of it all a very rich man because of the pay-off s. Later, still adhering to his tribal customs he struck a similar deal with a local sheik, Abimelech. God told Abimelech, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman you have taken." Abimelech "hadn't touched her" and reproached Abraham at the same time loading him down with presents in payment for his trespass.

In his continuing denseness - that any woman would do for the continuance of his lineage, Abraham conspired with Sarah, who was by now despairing of children, to take her slave girl as a concubine and begin this promised line with her fertility. It was an established custom with their people.

God would have none of this either! Sarah was the chosen woman, not Hagar. Sarah's womb would bring forth the desired child, not a slave woman's, nor even a second wife (after Sarah's death, Abraham married the prolific Keturah - but none of her children were among the chosen. It was riot so much Abraham's seed as it was Sarah's).

Analyzing the story thus, we come to a startling conclusion that though Abraham as patriarch received the promises from God, it was according to the ancient prophecy not man's seed that was important in the generation of the People of God, but woman's seed. And not just any woman, but a particular woman. God had chosen her, barren Sarai, as her name was at the first. In the importance of name, God changed both Abram's and Sarai's by adding a consonant from his own - H-, making them Abraham and Sarah. Thus He recognized them as wholly changed people by their encounter and association with Him.

Why then, did God chose a barren woman?

The first woman, declared the inspired myth, had conceived after her deception and expulsion from Paradise. At the birth of that child she had praised God saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord." From that first conception and birth it was recognized that it took three to bring into being the People of God. It is not enough for man and woman to come together, but the Lord also participates. It is a principle that has almost been lost to human knowledge in the age of test tube babies and rented wombs and the abortion of a living child.

But in the revelation of God in the ancient stories of Genesis it is laid down as a principle governing human life. For it was not just Sarah whose seed was given life specifically by God before she conceived in the natural course by sexual union with Abraham, but in the next three generations God underlines this mysterious truth as essential to all that will come after.

There is a certain one, a chosen woman, who is essential in bringing forth children of the Promise. Read the stories of divine guidance that brought that *right* woman to Isaac, and to Jacob. The *right* woman is in all three of the first generations barren. Patriarchs may experience great theophanies, receive on-going promises, and make binding covenants with the Almighty, but those covenants and promises have no force without the intimate miracle that takes place within the womb of the chosen woman. It is her seed by which redemption will be accomplished. God is the Third Person in each of the unions. Such an idea shows up in an old book title of Bishop Fulton Sheean, it takes "Three to Get Married," which has been the understanding of Christians until obscured in these latter days.

It might be questioned in the case of Rachel that there was anything specially significant about her conception, since her sister Leah was mother to six of the sons to head the twelve tribes, two slave girls were mothers to four, and Rachel herself had only Joseph and Benjamin. However, that little flag that marks her barrenness flies over her child thus conceived as set-apart and of greatest significance to the continuance of the People of God. When we consider the role of Joseph, we recognize that God has spoken again through his choice of a barren woman. It takes man, woman and God! Joseph will be the savior of his brothers.

Is it not clearly an established principle in Genesis that woman's seed is the significant agent, and that sexual union on the highest plane is to be seen as a union of a man, a woman and God? Human beings do not copulate like animals, there is the divine dimension, and that marks those conceived as individuals brought into this world by more than mere biological mechanics.

This story would in itself be marvelous to tell. But there is more. In the fourth generation of the patriarchs another particular woman emerges. To appreciate her story we must set aside the post-Sinai knowledge of God's law - she lived long before it, and see a woman guided by one strong instinct within her tradition - woman's seed must be brought to fruitfulness!

In the patriarchal lineage three sons are ahead of Judah in the claim to headship of Israel's twelve sons. His brothers Reuben, Simeon and Levi all hold prior claim by order of birth. Yet, Jacob's strong blessings over his sons before his death sets the record straight - and his words will come to pass. Reuben is disinherited from his place of first born because he lay with his father's concubine; Simeon and Levi lose their places as runners-up because of their violence against the people of Shechem. The leadership role falls to the fourth son of Leah, Judah. Jacob's blessing of him gives him overall governance of the tribes, and prophesies that from his tribe will come the one to whom the ruler's staff belongs (RSV Gen. 49:10).

Judah has taken a wife. Ahhh! This time, obviously not conscious that he is to meant to be guided in the choice by God, he has chosen a despised woman of Canaan whose bottom drawer religion will become a snare to Israel. Three sons are born, but none of them are suitable to continue the legacy of faith that God has invested in these people because their mother is not the chosen woman. With Hebrew-like understanding that God alone accounts for good and evil happenings, the inspired story tells us that God kills first Er and then Onan, the latter because he refuses to take Er's wife Tamar, and grant her children. Such was the ancient law among the Semites. The brother was to impregnate the wife of the deceased and bring up children in the name of his brother. Onan refused. He spilled his semen on the ground.

The woman Tamar presents yet another facet of woman's meaning presented in Genesis. She regards her fertility as demanding fertilization by this family - the promise of God that it is woman's seed motivates her. In a certain regard she too deserves that flag that marks the barren woman as someone specially chosen by God. The obstacles to her fruitfulness must be overcome by whatever means are available. She dresses up in the garb of a cult prostitute and sits beside the road she knows her father-in-law Judah travels.

She succeeds in snaring him to father her child which turns out to be twins. His Canaanite wife will not be a mother of Israel, but this woman Tamar will be. Resourcefulness, refusal to accept Judah's dodge of his responsibilities, wins Tamar motherhood for the People of God, and a place among four women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy (Matt 1:3). Even Judah ends up praising her, "She is more righteous than I."

The Semites generally practiced circumcision; it was another of their traditions that God saw useful to his teaching. In infusing Semitic practices with divine truth, God would take this tradition and lift it into service for his own purposes Before the circumcision rite was bound upon Abraham as part of the covenant, Abraham had fathered Ishmael who would be " a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him,

dwelling over against all his kinsman.” (RSV Gen 16:12) Ishmael would be the progenitor of the Arab tribes. He would not be one of the patriarchs of the Chosen People.

In order for that child to be conceived who would be the child of promise, the procreative agent of the male must be marked by God. That mark of circumcision would be a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham’s family. It was to be kept in all generations to mark procreation among these people as something special. After the rite of circumcision is established, God helps to conceive the child of promise, Isaac, from Sarah’s seed. Again God is underlining the Truth he is teaching in the inspired stories of Genesis - God’s People exercise their sexuality for procreation under a mandate from God and with God.

It is to be noted that Moses as an exile from Egypt among Midianites runs into circumcision are a particular problem with his foreign wife. Zipporah, the woman he married in Midian, refuses to have her sons circumcised. Moses is unable to overcome her objections and the boys remain uncircumcised.

God meets Moses in the tremendous theophany of Exodus, chapter three, and sends him on his mission back to Egypt to be His agent for the deliverance of Israel. Yet, otherwise incomprehensibly, on the way to carry out this mission Moses becomes deathly ill. Zipporah’s feminine intuition tells her that Moses is being tested by God Himself. She knows what it is about! Her husband is not fit to lead a nation if he cannot be head of his own family in carrying out the covenant. She circumcises the boys and presses their foreskins against Moses’ sexual organs crying out in repentance and submission, “You are a bridegroom of blood to me!” (RSV Ex. 4:24f) Her act establishes the two of them as united in God’s purpose, and Moses recovers to go to be God’s prophetic deliverer.

Another important dimension of these women of Genesis has been obscured in this feministic age. These women were not chattel, nor were they oppressed by the patriarch. They were women of verve and cunning; they often changed the course of events. They saw to it that their insights were heard, and more - followed. They were considered as persons of worth and stature. God Himself said to Abraham, “Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you.” And Sarah chewed Abraham out more than a few times, having him meekly doing her bidding in regard to the slave woman Hagar. What was lacking in the cultural assumptions about women in the men themselves was more than made up for by God who impressed that women were not mere trading bits as he constantly retrieved both Sarah and Rebekah from foreigners harems.

Rebekah was asked to give her consent before her father Bethuel and her mother blessed her and sent her off to marry Isaac. The decision was not made for her. Rachel and Leah were consulted by Jacob before they all sneaked away from the women’s treacherous father Laban - Jacob asked for their cooperation before implementing his plan.

The woman in Genesis yields herself to the great overall plan of God. He chooses her specifically to become the mother of His People. The patriarch has external dealings with the Almighty One that are impressive and lay the sound foundation upon which all Salvation History including the Cross of Christ rests, but it is within the woman that the miracle takes place that fulfills the promise of that Salvation.

No wonder that the Hebrew women who hear Jesus on the Way of the Cross that fateful day can not comprehend his prophetic words about an even more fateful time - a time would come when women would actually say “Blessed are the unfruitful - the wombs that don’t bear and the breasts that don’t nourish.” It was not

conceivable in their tradition. When that happens, said Jesus, the apocalypse is near. Perhaps we live at the end of the story; our generation has certainly lost the truth that was so early gained.

5 THOSE POOR MISQUOTED SCRIPTURES!

Since the feminist revolution, gender language in the Old and New Testament has been analyzed and dissected both to prove that it is hopelessly misogynistic, and that God is Mother to us as well as Father. Revelation is thus often ignored or derided for its consistent presentation of God as masculine and Father on the one hand, and lauded and cited for its supposed references to the divine maternity on the other. Unfortunately for those committed to this viewpoint a critical appraisal finds that there are no references at all to support the motherhood of God.

It is these few but oft quoted references to the motherhood of God that has concerned me from the first time I saw them used in the Pastoral on Woman, “Male and Female God Created Them,” written by two Minnesota Bishops in 1981. Since that time in Catholic literature time and again the use of these scriptures crops up always purporting to the motherhood of God and the use of feminine pronouns in regard to Him/Her. The uncritical copying and passing on of this distorted use of scripture has become so persistent it can even be found in the most orthodox of sources. When they appear in a book on the Marian teachings of Father Maximillian Kolbe, we realize how far the erosion in regard to these verses has gone. Fr. Kolbe’s interpreter and the writer of the book *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit* (Franciscan Marytown Press) Fr. H. M. Manteau-Bonamy, O.P., going beyond the bounds of Father Kolbe’s thought, quotes, “The prophets compare the love of God sometimes to a father’s love, and sometimes to that of a mother.” . . . “Are there anywhere in the Bible passages more poignantly moving than those in which God’s love for man whom he wishes to save is likened to a mothers love?” The abused verses are pulled out once again to support this statement. Fr. Manteau-Bonamy obviously has not gone back to the references to analyze them in their context. He is merely quoting another writer. The result is that the mistaken notion is passed on, this time, surely without guile, but laid next to the writings on the Blessed Mother by a saint they can be very damaging to the truth.

In the Pastoral letter of the Minnesota Bishops it was asserted, “Indeed, the Scripture uses images of mother-love as well as father-love in describing God’s compassionate and tender care of us.” The scriptures are the same as those used by Fr. Manteau-Bonamy, the same heard to bolster the genderless language debate, and the same used as defense when “Our Mother in heaven” is invoked. The time is long overdue to take these poor misquoted scriptures and scrub off the assumptions so widely believed.

That the Holy Trinity in His intimate interrelationships holds all possible positive aspects of being cannot be denied. All kinds of love have their primary source in God, the love of mother, of father, of wife, of husband, of child, of lover - a possible love is found initially in God alone. Mary’s blessed motherhood of pure love is because of her almost complete identification with the Holy Spirit as Father Kolbe demonstrates. Yet the importance that God in His Triune Persons be always considered masculine to us human beings is so overwhelming that in every case in Scripture the truth of this is rigorously guarded.

Isaiah 66:13ff is the favorite of the misquoted scriptures and is always used in this way: “As nurslings you shall be carried in her arms, and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you.” This, however is the actual context.

Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream,
and you shall suck, you shall be carried on her lap
and dandled on her knees,
As one whom his mother comforts,
so will I comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Obviously God does not present himself as the mother in this passage. The distinction he places between himself and Jerusalem is very clear. The same holds true for Isaiah 49:14-15, another favorite to substantiate God’s motherhood- “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even if she forgets you, I will never forget you. . . .” “The speaker is Yahweh, the Lord, who in the entire context of Isaiah presents himself as enduringly masculine though with a depth of compassion that surpasses all earthly love, even the love of a mother. Mothers may forget, it’s possible, but The Lord will not forget. This Lord continues, “Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord, your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.” The next chapter, the 50th, continues the theme with God identifying Himself as Husband and Father.

Isaiah 46:3-4 is also a standby text for the Mother-God argument, yet there is nothing necessarily maternal in the picture of God carrying the heavy burden which Israel had become. In fact it is explicitly stated in this passage that the one who carries is masculine!

Hearken to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house
of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried
from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs
I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and
will save.

Next to Isaiah in frequency, Hosea is often called on to bolster the femininity of God. Such a twist of Hosea’s intent cannot be supported by the text in which God speaks throughout as a betrayed husband and deserted father. There is no credence for assuming the speaker in Hosea 11:3-4 is maternal. The Father is expressing warmth and concern as we expect from either parent, mother or father. Nothing maternal is stated here. Fr. Manteau-Bonamy’s source writes, “Osee (Hosea) declares (11:3-4) that God has taught Israel to walk, even as a mother teaches her child.” The actual text, with irrelevant passages deleted, reads:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called
my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me. . .
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my
arms; but they did not know that I healed them. .How can I give
you up, O Ephraim! My heart recoils within me, my compassion
grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will
not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy
One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy.”

Can this be considered to be the Mother-God talking? The context is quite the contrary. Neither can the Sirach reference, “God will love you more than your mothers did,” say anything to conclude the femininity of the One who loves more than human mothers. Again the actual wording is

you will then be like a son of the Most High,
and he will love you more than does your
mother.

The use of Numbers 11:12-14 is an outright exaggeration. Here Moses, not Yahweh, complains that he didn't conceive this people, and asks God why they have been laid upon him like a “nurse carries a suckling child?”

The humble submission of the soul, “like a child quieted at its mothers breast” in Psalm 131 is a beautiful poetic image of peace which though it has no bearing on the question at hand, is often cited.

The Minnesota Bishops pastoral stated “The word ‘Father’ by which we, in imitation of Jesus, pray to God is a *metaphorical term*, and in terms of metaphor God both mothers us and fathers us.” (Italics mine)

Jesus absolutely did not pray “Father” metaphorically! He prayed “Father” analogically. Surely the vast difference between the two is well known. In a metaphor there is a similarity which is admittedly arbitrary, in an analogy there is a comparison between two distinct forms which rests on something they really have in common. Jesus, it is sometimes declared, referred to himself in female images. Can the metaphor, “like a hen gathers her chicks” or the parable of the woman and the lost coin be in the same order as Jesus’ proclamation of Himself as the long awaited Bridegroom?

Throughout the Old Testament God is speaking analogically about his Fatherhood, His husband-hood, His lover role, and never says “like a Father,” he says he is the Father - I Am He, I am your Husband, I am your lover. Scripture cannot be found to support the Motherhood of God in a single thread. That may bring some disappointment, but eventually it should clarify all the gender language confusion.

Such a radical consistency in the Word of God must point to something of utter importance to our Salvation. It cannot be an insignificant point, nor can it be something merely-cultural. Culture cannot account for it - other religions during the same time frame had goddesses by the gross. Through two thousand years of various cultures, through all its various literary forms, through all its diverse writers the Holy Spirit has spoken “He” not “She.”

God, however, knowing that we need a mother gave us Mary, Jesus’ own mother, and in a kind of extended dimension of her, He gave us the Church. Here we gain all the nurturing love, all the maternal care we need for it is lavished upon us. In so doing, God has kept the great mystery of his relationship with us, as husband to wife, as lover to beloved, clear of adulteration and confusion. The mother, Mary and Church, is still of the earth and human, and the Father is still the subsisting God. Let us be watchful for careless scrambling of what has such great portent, especially when we approach the inspired Word of God.

6 RUTH, ESTHER AND JUDITH: PROTO-FEMINISTS?

The three books in the Bible named for women each tackle the age-old “authority problem.”

The three women who have books of the Bible named after them make a lively contribution to the unfolding of Salvation History because they speak to us, men and women in the Twentieth Century, as we struggle with the age-old problems of authority and obedience. Why have homes generally been ordered by men while women are the ones to obey; why has the church had male clergy with nary a woman; and why has government been the bailiwick of men till now? Ruth, Esther and Judith tell us that there is more to scriptural woman than meets the eye. She has a significant meaning where authority is concerned. We can almost see their direct eyes piercing ours as they seek to have their stories retold and understood. “Listen,” they say, “hear our insights on the very things you seek to understand. It has all been worked out before, and before, and before. . .

From the beginning to the end of the most read Book in the world one continuous riveting story unfolds. It is the account of how man and woman deceived by a bitter enemy lost their rich inheritance on this earth. They fell into comparative destitution, but their Maker and Lover would not rest until he had won them back. He restored their inheritance at grievous cost, with neither appreciation or cooperation. The Bible tells this story by linking human experiences of painful progress and immense obstacles, of glory and ignominy, of bright hopes and crushing despair.

The Lover could have given up, but he didn't. His beloved mankind, whom he called “Bride” had gone so far away from Him it would be an incredible feat to persuade man and woman to return to Him freely. Similar to a parent teaching an uncomprehending toddler on the curb of a busy street (a sharp word, and perhaps a spank will keep a beloved child alive), he had to teach severely at times; but it was for love - he didn't want them stubbornly to get beyond his loving reach into irretrievable dangers. They had the freedom to do just that.

Obviously, all authority lay with God the Lover; he could command, it would come to pass. But this is not the way to love your sweetheart. Freedom is the way to love. They, like a free woman (woman, you see, is a vivid sign of the way of salvation in scripture), would have to choose him again, but how? An evil adversary, says Scripture, had persuaded them that his authority (he was, after all, *the* Author) was repressive, self-serving, and unjust. He would have to woo them; eventually he would love them back to himself.

In the meantime back at earth's ranch, there is a terrible authority problem. We see it today in monstrous behaviors and attitudes. In families, order degenerates into battering, abuse, and rebellion - the statistics are

frightening; in the Church, order can be autocratic, deaf, and heavy handed; in government, authority often is repressive, and self-serving. Or anti-authority may hold sway - everything from willful independence to the most amorphous leadership. All have been affected by disorder, not just the minorities under the authoritarian heel of others, or those culturally bound by traditions long fallen away from justice which includes women. Yet women seem to carry the brunt.

It was ever thus! From the expulsion from the Garden, where Paradise was living in union with God, the woman has been the key to reestablishing God's lawful authority and mankind's lawful freedom, or not. That's how important she is in the whole Biblical scheme of things! It must be woman first to understand. That's why Ruth, Esther, and Judith call to us so insistently. "Hear, our story, read and understand. It has all been worked out before, and before and before. . .

Their stories are not feminist revelations. Feminism has done a great service in awakening a sinful world to the "authority problem," but the revolutionary insights of the Bible are, after all, considered quite as unacceptable in solving modern problems as they were in their own times.

Ruth, Esther, and Judith each contributes a piece that will fit exactly into the total picture which will in time be Jesus, the loving Bridegroom. And they cast wonderful light upon their greater Hebrew sister, Mary the Blessed Mother of Jesus. Woman is the key to opening the locked vault that is earth's bondage to the miserable "authority problem." Scripture says so in stories and images from Genesis to Revelation.

Our three, especially interesting because they have named whole books, are only three among hundreds of women God has relied upon to move the whole people closer to the wedding feast where he will "marry them again," says the Bible. Sexual imagery is very important in the Word of God.

That two of these shining women may not be historical, but rather allegorical is no obstacle to the truth of their story. Inspired story may, in fact, be more effective in presenting God's truth than mere historic fact.

Ruth the first of the trio, however, is both a historical woman and a light bearer on the problem of authority. In her time, about eleven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the problem of authority was that there was none! Losing hold of the covenant (their marriage-like contract with God) the People of God were floundering, falling under the control of others more powerful than themselves time after time. Harassed and oppressed, they would repent of their infidelity and call to God for help. In compassion he would send them a deliverer - a Samson, a Gideon, a Jephthah, a Deborah. But in between these Spirit-inspired leaders, the people would fall back into bad times. The book of Judges, describing why this was so, repeats in terms that sound very contemporary, "In those days there was no King in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes."

Against this background of "everyone doing their own thing," a young woman will enter Israel from a hated foreign land. She will have all the qualities, despite her heathen background, to bring a solution to the authority problem of her day - the problem of anarchy. She will with God's help establish a family from which David, Israel's perpetual "golden-haired boy," will come. David's Kingdom will be used in Biblical analogy over and over again as a prototype for the Reign of God, the time when all on earth will be restored to willing obedience under God's benign and bountiful order.

From what unlikely ground did God raise up that handsome and gifted family of Jesse of whom David was the youngest son? Jesse's grandmother, Ruth, an obedient, Yahweh-fearing woman was not an Israelite, she was rather one of the despised Moabites. Her husband's family, man, wife, and two sons, were Hebrews who immigrated to Moab during a time of famine in Canaan. There the father of the family died leaving his widow, Naomi, and her two sons, who both had married Moabite women. Disastrously, one after the other, the two sons died. Naomi and her daughters-in-law found themselves in the most wretched of circumstances, widows without children and therefore without provision for their old age.

While she goes back to her home country near Bethlehem, both of the younger women are begged by Naomi to go and find new husbands among their own people. One does return to the Moabite ways, though reluctantly. The other, Ruth, has absorbed the Hebrew faith in Yahweh; she cannot consider turning back from the road that leads her closer to Him. She will go with Naomi to become part of the people of God.

Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

A woman whose hope of marriage and children lies in staying in her own home country among her own people chooses to leave it all and follow a mysterious value she has seen in another - a value of life, of God and of person, she has seen reflected in her mother-in-law whom she loves. How much she gives up for this greater good! As a foreign woman in a strange land which despises her heritage, she will have little chance to find a husband; and her mother-in-law is too old to raise a son who will eventually fulfill the duty of marriage to her. She has no dowry or bride price to offer a man, she is destitute along with her mother-in-law, who owns only a small parcel of land left by her husband. Together they must depend on Ruth's gleaning from fields for their sustenance.

By Hebrew law, these two widows need a redeemer - one of their own kin who will take up the family responsibility for them. The kinsman redeemer will purchase the small property to aid Naomi, and will take Ruth as a wife to produce offspring for the continuance of Naomi's husband's line which has been cutoff. But where is there such a man? And how can it happen for two poor widows, one old, the other an unclean heathen? The two of them have nothing. . . but faith!

The courtship of Boaz and Ruth brings into the otherwise bleak scene at the time of the Judges, a picture of people who in the midst of fallen mankind still reflect something of the image and likeness of God. Together they exercise a godly masculinity and godly femininity through which Yahweh brings a fruitfulness which depends upon, yet transcends, the biological.

Totally suppliant to the will of God, Ruth is not spineless, but displays courage and initiative. The current word is "assertive." She goes to Boaz at night, and on the threshing floor where he sleeps guarding the harvest, she lies down at his feet.

At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maidservant for you are next of kin ." And he said, "May you be blessed of the Lord my daughter; you have made this last kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men whether poor or rich. . . I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.

Before the town elders Boaz makes the legal arrangement with the other eligible kinsman. He redeems Ruth and Naomi by purchasing the property that Naomi holds in her husband's name, and by marrying Ruth. "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her and the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son."

God has found a woman to mother a lineage that will bring a King to rule over His people. This King, despite human weaknesses, will be a man after his own heart, he will be the one who will precursor his own Son on earth, the One who will be called the Son of David.

What does Ruth say to the twentieth century man and woman wearily, weakly, facing unruly families, disordered society, and a Christian body lacking peace and unity?

She says, "Look again at your God! Heed him! Hear his call and put it above all the other tempting voices in your daily surroundings. Ask him for the gift of faith. First you, my sisters, because you are the key to renewed order in home, society, and church, but then you, my brothers, too, must become submissive to your role like Boaz. A woman is dependent and trusting by nature, but she is not to be weak or lacking assertiveness. Don't be afraid to strike out in new ways trusting God to be good to you. If you leave the old selfishness behind and follow God with wholehearted yieldedness, he will establish his benevolent Kingdom through you. Out of chaos will come peace and order, the reign of God - he will do it. He will make you fruitful, man or woman, just as he made me.

"And if you would understand the meaning of woman more, contemplate the one who came after me, the one who exemplified it all completely, your Mother Mary. She by simple obedience, surpassing me, incarnated the Author-ity against a background of disorder and confusion. She solved the 'authority problem' once for all."

The Book of Esther claims an historical time during the rule of one of the Persian emperors, Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, about five hundred years before Mary and Jesus. Illustrating the way God honors a trusting, obedient woman, it adds another dimension to the picture of woman and her inherent power to unravel the 'authority problem.'" Hidden behind archaic social customs, this woman exemplifies scriptural principals that transcend space and time.

The obstacle facing God's people is an extreme one - they are threatened with annihilation. A powerful and bitter enemy has cornered the King's own power to further his diabolical plan. Though a pagan, the Persian emperor, scripture declares, is at this point the legal earthly authority established by God over the Hebrews. In ancient Persia where the autocratic potentate's word was law no one was allowed into his presence without prior permission on pain of death. When such authority makes an utterly binding law to kill off God's people, what can one woman do?

Esther begins by fasting and praying for three days and enlists all the Jews in the region to fast and pray with her. Afterward cognizant of the danger, but with great resolve, she goes to the King courageously facing his possible interdict on her own life. Esther displays an attitude which can only be called respectful and honoring. Because of her demeanor, the King receives her gladly, hears out her request, and allows it.

The evil schemer is brought to his own death, but the King's word, once given, cannot be revoked even by the King himself. It has the same force as though God himself had spoken. The edict that will annihilate the Jews must now accomplish the thing that it orders. How can Esther's faith in God do anything against such an impossible obstacle?

King Ahasuerus, completely won by her loyalty to himself, allows her the power to make a counter edict. The Jews, her people, may defend themselves against those who seek to destroy them. The insurmountable problem is solved by God's action through a woman, a woman under the authority of an earthly ruler whose conscience is not sensitive to Yahweh. The flow of her will toward her husband, and thence toward God, once more turns the man in that direction.

St. Peter, with such holy strength in mind, will in another five hundred plus years write to women, "Likewise, you wives, be submissive to you husbands, so that some, through they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior." It is hardly a popular message, but in the context of our three women, we see the strength and wisdom these words are meant to convey.

The Book of Esther, then, whether a bit of pure history or an embellishment on it, is an inspired treatise on God's value system versus mankind's. It asks a willingness to make the ultimate self-sacrifice. "If I die, I die," says Esther; with total respect for the authority of God which resides in those who legally govern; and which rests on absolute trust in God which is sustained by prayer and fasting. Women are the exemplars of all three demanding spiritual strengths. Esther says to us who sometimes face a leadership that seems off course, "It is not by opposing, by fighting against, or by outwitting those in leadership over you that will you will force them to bend to the will of God. Pray for an obedient heart to that authority. Put yourself wholly on the line in asserting your case, wholly at the mercy of that lawful ordering. Trust God! He will use that person in authority as his own instrument for the furtherance of his own will, or else will remove him.

"And if you would understand God's intent for woman more, then contemplate the one who came after me who exemplifies it all completely, your Mother Mary. She by simple obedience, surpassing me, incarnated the Author-ity against a background of disorder, confusion and injustice. She solved the 'authority problem' once for all."

If we are tempted to give up on scriptural values at this point as too idealistic and not facing gruesome realities of evil, the Bible brings on its stage the woman, Judith.

Though it is an allegory of the struggle between good and evil, the book bearing her name is placed in an historical setting. The role of woman shines in that struggle. In this absorbing shocker the woman is even more symbolic of the whole people of God who are always feminine in relationship to Him in the Bible.

The sieges of the great war machines of the Assyrians are slowly but surely smashing all the cities of the earth, exterminating whole innocent peoples. Threatened by the furious onslaught of overwhelming numbers of evil forces, the Jewish populace of a small city looks to be doomed. Not only this community's life is at stake; it stands guarding a crucial pass through which the enemy must go to strike at the heart of the People of God - the temple in Jerusalem. Here is the symbol of the very Throne of God and his beneficent governance.

The immense tide of demonic evil is determined to sweep all Godly reign, all knowledge of the true God, from the earth "Who is God but Nebuchadnezzar," exults the Darth Vader-like commander, Holofernes. Humanly speaking the situation is hopeless for the town of Bethulia and the faithful people.

Where does God look for one who can thwart these forces of evil? Is it a great army with even more destructive weapons? Or a magnificent Superman with the powers of the thunderbolt?

No, his choice is a lovely young widow, rich but detached from riches and living with utmost simplicity, powerless but faithful to him, devout in all her ways. A woman of prayer and fasting is to be the instrument who will win out over an anti-God power which seeks to extend its authority over the whole world.

Judith comprehends the immensity of the problem facing God's people. She hears the proposed solution of the elders of her city and knows it to be contrary to the will of God. They plan to put God to the test and if he does not meet their demands they will surrender to the enemy. Judith with superior understanding of God's ways, fearlessly rebukes them, meeting with them as equals, eye to eye. She then comes to the council of elders with a plan which though she will not disclose its details, she assures them will save the people and ultimately Jerusalem.

She exhorts the council to courage. The magistrates recognize that "her heart's disposition is right;" that is, her heart's intent is to serve God. She is rooted in humility, not arrogance - even in her dealings with the council she does not antagonize the elders because of her forthrightness. They enthusiastically bless all her future endeavors. Judith has laid her plan with utmost care. Upon a foundation of trust in God she has built a detailed plan and made provision for carrying it out, so that the prideful enemy will have his arrogance crushed by the hand of a woman. The evil Holofernes relies on overwhelming physical power and might; his strength lies in vast numbers of fighting men and gross fighting machines. Her strength, in contrast, lies in helplessness and weakness - except for God.

She clothes herself in sackcloth and ashes, deepens her prayer, and cries out to God. Afterwards, mobilizing all her gifts to accomplish the purposes of God, she puts aside mourning and tears. God has given her great beauty, she will use it for his victory; God has given her wit and cleverness, she will use it to deceive the enemy. She has starch, backbone, grit. Planning her mission so that she will not be drawn into a situation which will compromise her faith even among the godless, she will not in one iota relax the law of her religion, neither will she in a single word discredit her God. Her mission does not excuse her from her first duty - to worship and honor God.

Her deceit will be to mislead Holofernes with double meanings, and draw him into her plan by his own corrupt imagination. She uses his big ego; his loftiness, vanity, and presumption, as her own weapons. After a discreet interlude which Holofernes interprets as seductive, he is drunk. Judith, depending on God's strength and timing, takes his own sword and lops off his head, and carrying this bloody evidence in a sack she slips back to Bethulia.

The army suddenly discovers it is leaderless; a helpless woman has bested them! Thrown into consternation, thousands retreat in total confusion and victory belongs to the jubilant defenders. Judith becomes a name of honor for all time among the Jews.

Holofernes and company are allegorical for the evil powers of Satan. They have been confronted by a woman who shows all mankind the way to oppose evil. The Bible counsels, "Resist the Devil and he will flee."

Holofernes' sword in Judith' hand was strong resistance. Humble ones, the poor of Yahweh, will be vindicated by the God of the universe, says the Bible.

Judith overturns all our conceptions about how things work. She says to us men and women of the Twentieth Century, "Remember the way God looks at things. Do you want power? Do you scorn the feminine

because God made woman dependent and submissive? Then you strike at all that it means to be human, not to say, female, and at the heart of Holiness as well.

“God works through the weak when they pray and trust. That does not mean passivity! We do not submit to ungodly authority, or to demonic power whose intent is to destroy faith. It means, rather, counting the cost, then devising and working through a plan with courage. Great evil can be overcome by one stroke when it is guided by God’s hand.

“And if you would understand God’s intent for woman more, then contemplate the one who came after me, the one who exemplifies it all completely, your Mother Mary. She by simple obedience, surpassing me, incarnated the Author against a background of disorder, confusion, injustice, and evil. She defeats Satan! She solves the ‘authority problem’ once for all. Hurrah for the weak, the despised of this world - the feminine, the Woman!”

7 REFLECTIONS ON RUTH AND MARY – SISTERS

At the very end of the turbulent book of Judges, which is a tale of rebelliousness, apostasy, and oppression, there is a telling statement, “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.” Despite the attempts of some Protestant scholars over the years to justify the absence of earthly authority during the time of the Judges, calling it the “ideal,” anarchy, the rule of the each self-will, is depicted in Judges as more the ideal of hell. That time of chaotic libertarianism closely approximates the same prevalent ideology of our own time.

Tucked between this picture of bitter experiences of the people of God and the positive steps toward unity of the Davidic Kingdom told in the books of Samuel is a little book of four chapters, the book of Ruth. One of three books in the Bible named for women, and as easily overlooked as the Godly role of woman often is in a power dominated world, this little book is a wellspring for our intellect and our spirit.

Like the two other books named for women, Esther and Judith, hidden within the polished words of Ruth lie scriptural roots to our deeper understanding of Mary, the Blessed Mother. And, on yet another level, here are insights into the role of every Godly woman. As one of a many threads making the strong strand of Old Testament women and thoroughly at one with it, the figure of Ruth at the same time reiterates the truth taught through Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Tamar, the mothers of Israel. All together the Old Testament women fill out our comprehension of woman as she is perfectly imaged in the human Mother of God.

Seeking the foreshadowing, the layered meaning, the light-bearing indications in the Old Testament in the figures, events and mysteries of the New was once the way the Fathers approached Scripture. Such an approach has become unfashionable. Reductionism has taken this rich heritage from us. Yet *Dei Verbum* states clearly, “God, the inspirer and author of both testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New.” It is from this base that we find the shadow of Mary in Ruth, and a model for all women in them both.

Looking forward in time, what is true about Ruth, whom God chose to bridge the gap between the anarchy of the time of the Judges and the order of the Davidic Kingdom, is also true about the woman God chose to bridge the ultimate chasm between the anarchy of this world and the order of the Kingdom of God, Mary. God still looks for such women to bridge the chaos in home and Church today toward a more secure Christian community. Looking

back through time, Ruth adds a new understanding about the character of the earlier women upon whom God relied to fulfill the covenantal promises he had made with their husbands - the wives of the patriarchs.

The first fact that flies like a flag above all the women chosen especially by God, from Sarah to Ruth to Mary, is barrenness. Whenever we see that flag, we are being pointed to a supreme truth. God's People are not the result of mere biological reproduction. They do not copulate and produce young like the animal realm. For the people of God three persons are necessary. A man, a woman, and God himself. That Sarah, Rachel and Rebekah (spiritually more importantly the wife of Jacob than Leah because she bore the "saviour" of his brothers) were barren is not mere coincidence. God specially chose these women who were humanly unable to conceive.

Abraham had other sexual partners and other children - God chose none of those women or their offspring. In the case of Isaac, barren Rebekah was pointed out to Abraham's servant as the right and only one - the wife God had chosen for the furtherance of his people. God *chose* barren women.

Carefully reading of the mothering of the fourth generation of the Chosen People finds Tamar, a woman barren by circumstances, asserting her right of fruitfulness for God by seducing her father-in-law. Judah, when he gets over the shock, admits that by the norms of the time her action was more righteous than his. He had withheld from her the right of biological fruitfulness. Tamar, then, also has the flag of barrenness that marks her as a legitimate mother of Israel, though something new has been added - the assertiveness of a woman to fulfill her right to be fruitful. Since God's revelation at the first that it would be woman's seed who would overcome the enemy (Gen 3:15), a Hebrew woman knew her meaning and fulfillment was linked to bearing the People of God. (Jesus himself, foresaw that something incredible would happen in the future - a fact more devastating, he said, than his own crucifixion, and it would be that women would lose this consciousness. The Hebrew women he spoke to must have found this saying incomprehensible. It is found in Luke 23:28

From these revelations we see new threads in the strand which, upon completion, is the woman, Mary. Though the questioner of the role of Mary in the Catholic Church cannot find explicit statements to his satisfaction about her in the New Testament, perhaps he can be led with patience to examine the whole cord of truth about God's woman and find the answers he seeks there. It is certainly an approach that can show the limitations of fundamentalism's view of the Bible more than any other. The Catholic view of the Bible has always been, until this century, that it is of one piece, that no single sets of words give the whole story on any given theme, that to comprehend it one must engage the Holy Spirit who wrote it and who will uncover its mysteries to the believer in the context of the whole Church.

So we go to the book of Ruth not only to enjoy its historical dimensions of a real woman of God who was used to bring Godly order out of chaos, but also to understand "*Woman*", as Jesus twice called his mother.

First, this woman, Ruth, foreigner though she was, was a woman of the true faith. Like Abraham, our Old Testament father of faith, she saw a vision of God and left everything to follow him. Ruth saw this vision in another woman, her mother-in-law Naomi, who was a faithful servant of the God Yahweh, unknown in Moab. Through Naomi's life, despite all her hard luck, shone something so marvelous, so unusual that Ruth would forsake "her country, her kindred and her father's house" like Abraham. As a Moabitess, a most hated race to the Jews, she had no future with the Israelites. A Moabite widow - who would want her? Naomi knew that the answer was "no one."

She communicated this to her daughter-in-law emphatically. A kindly woman, she wanted the best for these loyal daughters-in-law of hers. But she had nothing to offer them.

The Levirate law would have given them another husband, a brother of their deceased husbands, but there were no more brothers, and Naomi had no hope of more sons even if they would wait (as Tamar had). Her wishes for them, expressed in the Hebrew language more strongly than the English, are that they not have merely passing security, but true fulfillment and fruitfulness in the home of a husband. Therefore, she reasoned, they should both stay in Moab among their own people where such a wish might come true.

Orpah is persuaded and turns back - no recrimination is due her. She chose what was normal and right. But Ruth stepped out to something beyond the normal. She walked on with Naomi thus seeming to choose barrenness. For a higher thing, a vision, she said "yes" to the question her mother-in-law had presented truthfully, "Would you therefore refrain from marrying?" Through that "yes" God worked to make her more fruitful than she could have imagined.

This is exactly the teaching the Church has about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is a perpetual virgin, says the Church. "Where do you find it in scripture?" asks the unsure. "Do you have the patience to examine all the threads and the humility to let the Spirit lead you?" replies the Church.

When Mary responds to the angel's revelation that she is chosen to bear a child who will be Son of God, she asks "How shall this be since I know not man?" She knows how babies come into this world, and she knows that she is engaged to be married. The question would not have been asked had she not had some impediment to those two answers being enough for her.

She has already struck out on a higher path than the right and the normal. With Ruth she has already answered to the demands of this path, "yes, I will refrain from marrying." What was the vision that brought her to the place of figuratively leaving her country, her home, her father's house? Living above the norm certainly has us take leave of these normal comforts. We don't know, but there are indications in the New Testament that others are called to do the same (see I Cor. 7:37). Perhaps she and Joseph together had shared such a vision. What is seen clearly in Ruth can be no less true of Mary.

Both had chosen barrenness in order to fulfill a higher calling. Because of that choice, the flag of barrenness now flew above them. God found them after his own heart, women he could unite to himself in order to bring to a higher fruitfulness. The picture is partial as it must be with the foreshadower, Ruth; it is complete with the woman, Mary. The thread from the women that preceded Ruth, however, is woven in here - Boaz marries her, he "goes in to her"; but again, one man and one woman having sexual relations do not bring forth the next link of the People of God. The scripture is explicit about that; "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son,' (Yes, there are implications here that bear on why the Church believes contraception contrary to the rule of God for his People.)

When Boaz first speaks to Ruth in one of his grain fields, she replies (the RSV), "Why have I found favor in your eyes, (in which we note a flavor of the Annunciation) that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner." In the Hebrew in a play on words the reading is more like, "Your recognize me and I! I am unknown."

With all the significance of woman to God, seen from Sarah to the women of apostolic times, it seems a necessary part of her meaning and role that she remain “unknown.” Psychology and poetry have often marveled over the hiddenness of woman and have tried to penetrate that quality of unknowableness. It might be attributed to her intuitive gift which is impossible to capture and define, but it goes far beyond that in the women of the Bible. Our day is trying to strip that mystery away from woman - it is part of the hated “mystique” which is accused of stultifying women. But to both Ruth and Mary it is integral to their being.

The hearers of Jesus murmured at him, says John 6:42, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

These folks thought they “knew” his mother. How much did they know of her? Almost nothing of significance even though they might have been her neighbors or even her relatives.

Her real life and her real importance to the whole of human life and history were hidden because they took place in her heart. They still are hidden. She who holds them is the treasure buried in the field, which when discovered is worth selling all to possess.

Women of God will never be more than superficially understood. They will never be capable of evaluation by a world whose values don’t include the concepts that must be brought into play to describe her. Try telling the world that it is a barren woman who is fruitful, an unknowable woman, a hidden woman whom God knows. In robot language “it does not compute.” Obviously for a growing segment of women in the Church it does not compute either, but their choices are often being made because of ignorance and that is something the Church can correct.

“Whose maiden is this?” Boaz asks his workers as he observes Ruth diligently gleaning after the harvesters. The answer to that question shines a light on another truth about the Virgin mother. It also shows the modern woman that being a woman of God does not preclude self-ownership. The answer to Boaz’s question is “no one.” That is, there is no human being who “owns” Ruth. By her own decision she has left her father’s home. She no longer “belongs” to her father. And her husband is dead. She does not “belong” to a man. Culturally that may have been all there was for a woman of her day - to belong to a man. Choosing to go with Naomi she had chosen to serve her mother-in-law but not to belong to her. She belonged on the human dimension only to herself. And she belonged to herself because she had decided to belong to God and not to the normal human cultural attachments.

In Greek the word for virgin is “parthenos.” That word is less a sexual word than a declaration that the woman who is “parthenos” is unmarried - a woman who is not owned by anyone but herself. Mary, too, had taken responsibility for herself. Following the Annunciation, the Scripture says, “Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country of Judah. This one, the most obedient of women, asked no one, evidently. We don’t have a picture of her getting permission from her parents to go on a three day journey by herself, we have no record of her asking Joseph, although she may have. The picture is that of a woman in possession of herself, making a decision and acting upon it. This is not because she is willful, but because self-ownership is right order for her place in life.

After marriage to Joseph, a choice she made to put herself under the authority of a man, her mode of action was different. God’s expectation was different also. Before her marriage, God dealt with Mary directly (through Gabriel), after that marriage he no longer presented choices to her directly, instead he dealt with Joseph to whom she

had submitted herself in marriage. Now Joseph received God's direction through dreams and Mary yielded to Joseph's headship, i.e. the flight to Egypt.

The feminists were on to something when they pointed out that women needed to own themselves, however limited their understanding of that. Taking responsibility for oneself allows a woman to give herself in service to God. Part of that service may be to a husband and family. When women were considered merely dependencies of first a father and then a husband they did not have the ability to give themselves, so their submission, only a requirement of their position, had no potential and no joy. You cannot give what you do not have. The two infusions God gives to the free woman who chooses to submit her will to His are promise and happiness.

Says Boaz to Ruth, "The Lord recompense you for what you have done (leaving home to follow Naomi), and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." His blessing came to pass. Ruth and Mary testify to that; Ruth because she somehow (either in heaven or on earth) lived to see David's reign; Mary because she lived to see the Resurrection of her Son.

Both Mary and Ruth needed a redeemer and both had one. Ruth and Naomi coming back from Moab to reclaim the family lands could not farm them alone. They needed someone in the clan (because by Mosaic law the land could not be sold outside of the family) who would purchase the land, and with it take responsibility for raising up children for Naomi's husband, the deceased Elimelech. Then in the future the continuity of clan and family with land for sustenance was assured, and in the present the widow and dependent children would have security. The role of the kinsman who would assume this role was called "goel". He would avenge wrong done to a relative, stand surety for a relative's debts, rescue from a plight, or assume the protection of a widow and impregnate her for her fruitful right. From "goel" Israel got their idea of redeemer - a rescuer, a releaser, a deliverer. And this same concept lies behind the Christian confession of Jesus as the world's Redeemer.

Ruth and Naomi needed a redeemer. Boaz assumed that role for them. Mary, too, needed a Redeemer. Though born without original sin, that human given waived in her case alone, what was done for her was done because of her Son, the Redeemer. Mary's original sin was waived by the Redeemer of all. Nothing more was done for her than he was to do for all mankind; it was simply done at a different point in time, before her birth, and not for her sake so much as for His. Upon embracing Christ as Saviour, Redeemer, the way is made to overcome the damning of original sin for all of us. As ultimately time has no significance and those in the Kingdom one hour are paid the same as those who have labored all day, the freedom Mary was given from birth by the Redeemer will have the same worth as the freedom we will all receive On That Day.

The contemplation of Ruth's story can take us further. It is on a threshing floor that Ruth makes the offer of herself to Boaz. Her courage and initiative are within the bounds of propriety, but she is not a coward. Her assertiveness would do any feminist proud, though her submission would confound them. "I am Ruth your maidservant." Assertiveness and submission are not mutually exclusive. Mary's submission is her hallmark, but it is not a mark of weakness any more than Ruth's. It is instead a mark of the Godly woman.

A threshing floor is the place where the good kernel is separated from the waste, the useless. Such separation was one of Jesus' common illustrations of the separation of those who heard the word and did it and those who neither heard nor heeded. In the end, it may be response to Mary that will be the test that separates the goats

from the sheep. Simeon prophesied over Mary, “And a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that the thoughts out of many hearts will be revealed.” Response to Mary is already making that separation in our Christian community. It is sadly evident. The choice is coming down to women, women who are cutoff from their heritage that comes through one hundred and thirty -three generations of women since Sarah, women who believe there is no value in that heritage, women who want to find a meaning outside of it.

Ruth and all you spiritual mothers of the Old Testament intercede for women today!

Mary, Mother of God pray for us.

8 EXPOSING THE THOUGHTS OF HEARTS

Some very mysterious words are prophesied over Jesus and his mother :“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.”

When the infant Jesus is brought into the temple area by his young parents for his Presentation, two saints of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, recognize him and prophesy over him. The last of these is the holy woman, Anna, and the first, the holy man, Simeon, who speaks these cryptic words.

The statement seems to have a secret, mysterious meaning. We read it over many times and aren't sure just what it is trying to say to us. We understand that somehow the opposition to Jesus will harm him and harm his mother also, and in that harming the secrets in the depths of the souls of men and women will be exposed.

The punctuation of this passage varies from translation to translation. It seems in the Greek to convey the idea that the piercing of Mary's soul will have as much to do with the revelation of human nature and its hidden secrets as the opposition to Jesus will have. That Jesus, “the sign of contradiction” will be the cause of the fall and rising of many - the stumbling block, we understand. Either we accept him as he presents himself to us, the Son of God, and step on into new life, or we deny him, stumble and fall back. He separates. “He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (Jn. 3:18)

But how does Mary's suffering with her son reveal hearts? The sword that pierces her soul is mysteriously part of the same dividing process. Somehow people's reaction to her participation in the suffering of her son will open these secret thoughts. The response of a person to Mary's participation in the suffering of Christ is telling.

A recent radio preacher, speaking according to the beliefs of many, rebuked those who call Mary, “mother” by asserting that Jesus' giving of Mary to John at the foot of the cross was his final way of disassociating himself from her, saying in effect, that “the woman meant nothing to him,” an indication Jesus had given previously , he said, by a negative interpretation of: “Who are my mother and my brothers? Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Mk.3:33-35).

In the Catholic Church some express embarrassment about devotion to Mary, so much so that her name is not easily mentioned. And others decry her kind of acceptance, her complete servanthood, as a poor self-concept, culturally ingrained. Or else the strong masculine side of her character is depicted as being more significant to her

meaning than this suffering, accepting side. The woman who stood at the cross and was engaged totally in the suffering of Christ is no longer held in awe; she no longer models the stance all believers pray to imitate. Mary's soul is being pierced today a thousand times over, and that rejection is indeed revealing the thoughts of many hearts.

Jesus told us that many would use his name, but at the judgment he would deny that he knows them. (Matt. 7:21ff) There is indication in scripture that the personal response to Mary as she suffers with her Son will reveal those whom he knows. To allow this test to do its work we must go to the foot of the cross as the scene is depicted in the Gospel of John. There we will kneel before the final agonies of our Savior and be present as the sword point pierces his heart, and at the same moment reaches the inmost part of the soul of Mary.

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."

Do we hear these words as being said to ourselves? Do we identify with the beloved disciple, knowing ourselves to be beloved too? Have we engaged ourselves enough with the real Jesus to be introduced to his mother by his words to us, "Behold your mother." as the beloved disciple was so introduced? If so we have heard him say to his mother, "Behold, your son, or your daughter," calling us by name. And the loving impulse is there to take her into our home, "welcomed as (our) own" as some translations put it.

The one criteria that Jesus gives for discerning those who are truly his own from those who are not is, "You will know them by their fruits." (Matt. 7:2) By Jesus' criteria - fruits, we recognize Mary's perfection. Jesus, the physical man, is the fruit of her womb, and through him she is also the most spiritually fruitful woman who has ever lived.

It was said of her "Blessed is she who believed that the word spoken to her would be fulfilled." That is spiritual fruitfulness, a belief in the Word of God so strong and unwavering that God may use it to bring into being what the Word promised. In Mary the miracle happened that lies hidden in the word "became" in those pregnant words, "And the Word *became* flesh." (Jn.1 :14)

If open to this truth, a person perceives that Jesus' gift of his Mother as mother to the believer is the culmination, the crowning of his earth work. The Greek New Testament is invaluable here - clear and unequivocal where the English translations tend to be obscure. Translated word for word in the Greek we have, Jesus therefore seeing the (his) mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved, says to the (his) mother: Woman, behold, the son of thee. Then he says to the disciple : Behold, the mother of thee. And from that - hour took the disciple her to his own home. After this knowing - Jesus that now all things have been finished, that might be fulfilled the scripture, says: I thirst.

With *the* mother given to the beloved disciple (the disciple who wrote these words) Jesus crowns his ministry. Nothing John records has a face value meaning alone. John does not record this because Jesus was just providing for his mother's daily needs by assigning her to a good household, though he was doing that on the elementary level (which causes us to wonder why, if as some insist, Mary had other natural sons and daughters, Jesus would give her to the care of a non-family member. It seems to indicate that the other "sons and daughters" of the Scripture are either foster children, or family relatives, nieces and nephews, brought up near, in and about the

family home in Nazareth). The elemental level aside, John the writer, who himself took Mary into his home believes that this giving of one to the other has a higher meaning. For in the doing of this act of gift giving, Mary to John and John to Mary, Jesus knows that all things are finished that Scripture might be fulfilled. Somehow Mary in John's home promises the fulfillment of all Scripture.

How can this be? Of what is Mary the sign, especially Mary in the house of the beloved disciple, that tells us that Jesus work is finished and that now Scripture is fulfilled - that he at last has made a way for it to all happen as prophesied. Of course, we are not overlooking here the fulfillment of Scripture in his death and resurrection, but that, too, in the context we are looking at has something to do with this mysterious linking of Mary and John.

There are many ways of contemplating it. First, in the Gospel of John itself, John quotes Jesus as calling Mary "woman" twice. Like two supporting piers to the ministry of Jesus, one of these occasions is at the very beginning and the other at the very end. In the first instance she is the instrument that both senses the timing of God and prods Jesus human reluctance onto the road that leads to Calvary, where the wine for which the world languishes will be supplied (the transcendent meaning of her plea, "They have no wine.") The other time is the scripture that we are examining, "Woman, behold your son." The woman stands at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' ministry. To the eyes of faith all in between rests on this woman.

This wedding feast itself has the promise of the fulfillment of scripture in it. The purpose of all Divine Revelation (the Scriptures) is to awaken mankind to his high origins in union with God, his unspeakable fall from that high place, and God's nature of forgiving love whose plan it is to restore him to union with Himself. Marriage is the symbol of this union, God, the husband and lover; the Chosen People, the bride and beloved. From this union comes all creativity, all fruitfulness.

The woman at wedding feast epitomizes in herself the perfected Chosen People, the bride who St. Paul will describe as "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." For this woman, the bride, in the words of the great love/wedding song, The Song of Solomon that centers the Holy Bible, "My dove, my perfect one, is only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her," is redeemed by God for the sake of and by the merits of her Son whom she is chosen to bear. This, too, has scriptural roots in the precursor of Mary, the woman Ruth, who is redeemed by her husband-to-be, Boaz, and is the only Old Testament woman of whom it is said, "the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son." That son carries on the Chosen line culminating in King David, the Old Testament figure of whom Jesus is said to be "the son."

The bride, the spouse of the Holy Spirit, is the one who says to her son at the marriage feast of Cana, "they have no wine," and to the servants, "do whatever he tells you," thus sending the groom out to die for his bride, the Church. "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word The bride, the woman Mary, is the model that God sets before his People that 'he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.'" (Eph 5:25-27)

How does Scripture describe this model which the Church is to become like? It is important that we see her fully because when she is "taken into the home" of the beloved disciple, which is extended through John to you and me, then all Scripture will be fulfilled. The Bride, the Church, will be ready and the bridegroom will return for the

consummation of the marriage - the People of God will be back to their original place of oneness with God, individually and collectively.

Mary is a virgin; that is, she has held herself in complete singleness of mind and purity of body for God who will become her spouse. Her reply to the angel, "but how can this be as I know not man," can be translated more logically (because she knows how it can be unless there is some unstated obstacle) - "but how can this be as I am not knowing a man." She has determined not 'to know' man. Looking at Ruth again, we hear Naomi question her determination to follow her and her God from her home country and people into an unknown land. "Would you therefore refrain from marrying?" Ruth and Mary answer this in the same way. Both say by their actions, "Yes, to follow God is a higher fruitfulness, I will forgo husband and family."

This makes both of them lovers of God with their whole being, and beloved by God. Fulfilling them both in fruitfulness despite their apparent denial of the normal human level, he finds Mary his heart's desire with a delight in her that the bridegroom expresses throughout the Song of Solomon, and which is condensed in the angel's greeting to her, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you."

Mary is an emotionally responsive woman - she is troubled. But her response on this level is controlled by her mind. Her feelings do not rule her, rather, schooled in the traditions and Scriptures of her religion, she looks for the meaning of what is happening to her. Again, the angel tells her that she is favored, so favored that God has chosen her to be the mother of his Divine Son, Jesus - that is, if she wills it. And after he has answered her thoughtful question, satisfying her that her complete dedication to God will not be broken, she replies in those unmatched words which make her the model for the Church beyond all others, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word." At this point Mary laid down her life and began to live a life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. Jesus in his ministry added to his family all those who do likewise, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Mary goes immediately to share what has happened to her with her cousin Elizabeth. She is a faith-community woman, not isolated or proud. (This humility and openness to others is seen again at Pentecost, when she, the mother of Jesus, is present and waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit with the one hundred and twenty.) Her knowledge and love of Scripture and the experiences of her people pour out of her in the song called the Magnificat. (Luke 1:46) Elizabeth provides us with more insight into her character - the character of the bride whom the Father loves and upon whom the Church is to be modeled. The older woman is thrilled by her presence, filled with the Holy Spirit, even as her babe responds to the presence of Jesus and Mary. She recognizes her great faith, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." It is not enough to just receive the word of the Lord, no matter the warmth with which it is heard, it must be believed in order for it to do the thing for which it is sent - and Mary believes.

Mary is like the other contemplative Mary who Jesus commended as she sat at his feet, "Mary has chosen the better part." She is a meditator; she ponders in her heart the things she sees concerning her son. Twice in Luke's gospel we are told this. We add to this the concern for the well being and happiness of others, displayed at the wedding feast; her traveling along with her son and the young men recorded by John following this celebration; and her concern for him when everybody was saying he was crazy, and we see her mother's caring heart.

It is true that she is a hidden figure in the New Testament - one must look for her, but this is as it should be, appropriate to the figure of the Church, completely dependent upon her Spouse for whose glory she exists. Though hidden we have all the information we need to present a fully formed human Mary, the model for all - man, woman or child, who are part of the Body of Christ.

When this woman, Mary, is present in the home of the beloved disciple(s) in all these aspects of belief, humility, submission, and fruitfulness in every man, woman and child, even as she was to the disciple John, then all Scripture will be fulfilled. The bride, the Church, will be formed and the bridegroom shall not be long in coming. Today we must be aware of all those ideologies which reject her specifically feminine, submitted presence. If she is rejected, then the sword which pierces her soul has revealed, indeed, the hidden thoughts and motives of hearts. Upon our response to the truth of Mary our true nature will be revealed. The sword that pierces her soul as it pierces Christ's heart, will cause to be revealed the true nature of our hearts. It may, after all, be she to whom our response will in the end separate us as sheep or goats. 'And a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.' What has it already revealed about the man who thought Jesus was disassociating himself from his mother when he gave her away because "she meant nothing to him?" Perhaps not malice, only ignorance which we will pray will be replaced with understanding.

9 WOMAN OF SORROW: GATEWAY TO JOY

A scriptural meditation

Robert Frost captured the inexpressible in woman's heart in his poem, "Home Burial." A woman sits on the stairs, huddled in misery, gazing out of the small window onto the hillside cemetery plot; her husband, perplexed, views her from the bottom of the stairs, then he speaks-

What is it that you see
 From up there always - for I want to know? . . .
 She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,
 Blind creature; and a while he didn't see.
 But at last he murmured, 'Oh,' and again, 'Oh.'
 What is it - what? she said.
 'Just that I see.'
 'You don't.' she challenged. 'Tell me what it is.'

 The little graveyard where my people are!

There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
 Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight
 On the side hill. We haven't to mind *those*.
 But I understand: it is not the stones,
 But the child's mound-

'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried.

Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?

'You can't because you don't know how to speak.
 If you had any feelings, you that dug
 With your own hand - how could you? -his little
 grave;
 I saw you from that very window there,
 Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
 Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly
 And roll back down the mound beside the hole.
 I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.

Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice
 Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,
 But I went near to see with my own eyes.
 You could sit there with the stains on your shoes

Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave
And talk about your everyday concern.

Woman is so close to life, and therefore to death, it is not by a mere quirk of fate that the universal emblem for her is a circle from which a cross extends. Attempts have been made to help ease that ever-present cross in woman's life and her often sorrowing role, and with some success. Yet, women everywhere seem to be asking why their deep communion with life means unavoidable pain. Women aren't masochists; they don't take up suffering for suffering's sake; but they do wonder if there is a spiritual meaning for the sorrow they so often carry. They are close to echoing in their own words a saying attributed to Viktor Frankl, the great psychiatrist who heroically practiced all he preached as an inmate of Auschwitz, "You can accept any how for the right why." But... what is the why?

What is this sea of emotion which we women do not contain, but upon which we are borne; that mysterious force which is involved with life, with beauty and with truth? It hurts!

It is not shareable! Husbands, sons, brothers, fathers may not share it. With other women it goes unspoken - we simply know that the cord that wraps around our heart to hold in the tears, winds round every woman's - that we are all bound by those silver strands, each to each.

What is this sadness that even the happiest, most extraverted woman feels, whether she has lost a child or not - it is for all the destruction, all the desecration of sacred life in all times and places. So firm that we feel it when we swallow; so heavy that we scarce can lift it with our breathing, but when we turn reason's eyes upon it it grows amorphous, hazy, dim. Yet, it speaks when we wouldn't. It cries out about the most trivial of things, embarrassing us; and then is silent when the real cause stares us in the eye.

We have all seen him, even though he is not our own. The little boy, not quite five years old, in his casket. Lips open, pink, with small white teeth - he would speak? His carefully parted curls combed down. Oh, God! A sacrificial lamb. The death of the fruit of a woman's body and soul.

We picture the Universe, vast, empty. Empty save for one small fertile seed. That seed is in us - Everywoman. God said from the beginning that it would be woman's seed who would redeem the lost. (1) The whole vast, empty Universe will soon be filled with Life because of that precious fertility. Fertile because we've given ourselves completely to Another - a man, yes, but primarily to God.

But wait! We have an enemy. Death stalks. He would snuff out the last small fertile seed if he could reach it. There is no place to hide, unless God prepares a wilderness place where Death cannot go. That is what the Bible says about woman - that it is her seed that Satan wishes to crush; that he is Death; and the woman because of her fruitfulness is his eternal enemy; and that were it not for God's special support of her Death would win.

But God has prepared a wilderness for *the* Woman, says the seer in the multi leveled prophetic writing of the Book of Revelation (2) he does that for the First Woman, Mary; for Everywoman; and for the Church (in the Bible she is a Woman). We women know the wilderness of solitude and quiet prayer, and love it.

The wilderness of meditation is far from every human habitation, there are no cities on its rim. There we fly, continues the visionary writer, with the two wings of a great eagle to a place where we are nourished.(3) The enemy, Death, who hates our life-giving powers, pours water like a river out of his mouth after us. Is his fatal river the daily propaganda that would deceive us about our eternal importance in God's plan, and the value of our sorrow?

He would sweep us away in the flood, but the earth is our friend. The earth comes to our help, opens its mouth and swallows the river which the dragon pours out of his mouth - is it the small, everyday earthy tasks that keep us sane?(4) "Keep us hid in the wilderness, Lord, we pray, "here we can begin to understand the why." We can embrace any how for the right why.

It is our very morphology that is the Great Sign that points to Life; we are so close to Life, less than a heartbeat away. Blessed Edith Stein tells us that our souls are shaped to our bodies and are naturally warm, expansive, clear, empty of self.(5) This is the gestalt of the feminine soul; it was the soul of the first woman, Eve, before she was seduced by Death; it is the soul of the Mother of God; and it is the soul of all women - that is, the women who St. Paul describes as having "birthed the Divine Child and have continued in faith and love and holiness with modesty." (6). How do we birth the Divine Child? The way Catherine deHueck Doherty describes in her book, *Poustinia*:

Your womb is a poustinia for the child, and you carry him wherever you go. Wherever you go you are pregnant with Christ, and you bring his presence as you would bring the presence of a natural child. For when a woman is with child, people give her special attention, They smile, they offer her a comfortable place to sit down. She is a witness to life. She carries life around with her.

This feminine soul incubates new life with her emotional warmth; her soul expands to take in the foreigner, the stranger, the orphan - larger, larger extend the perimeters of her tent;(8) the clarity there brings a heaven of light against pervasive darkness of stubborn wills; and self moves back and back to make space for love and love. We learn about it in the wilderness of contemplation.

Death hates us women, and Death is too much for us. For that fact Eve is forgiven. That is why God gave woman the honor of bringing Redemption through her seed - the small boy who grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man, he was born from woman's seed, and her's alone.(9) Outrageous truth! The small boy who still looked out of the wise eyes of the Saviour, that was he, as he staggered down the Via Dolorosa.

The women wept and beat their breasts.(10) Death stalked the Saviour. Would Death win again, and again? Could nothing stop him from destroying the Fruit? Was woman's seed to be snuffed out always without a prayer? Where was the fulfillment of the promise that woman's seed would defeat the Enemy?

He said, "You will know them by their fruits."(11) And a time would come, he said, when women would no longer value fruitfulness. A horrible time, women then would say, "Blessed are the wombs which don't bear, and the breasts which don't nourish."

Hebrew women would have a hard time believing in such a time as that. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Ruth, Hannah, and other holy women of all time - my own dear daughters, Paula and Angela, you've wept over your barrenness. You've pounded upon the doors of heaven to open to you - "life, send us life. We grieve for the life that is not." And God has heard all of your cries!

The men who protected them were given the external words from God, the promises, the covenants, and the prophecies. But women, the mothers who mourned, they received within their being the miracle. The divine touch of God was pulled within their suffering souls by faith. Life was given the woman so that promises, covenants, and prophecies given to the men would be fulfilled. Of the God-given dichotomy of the sexes, women

prefer life,(12) the miraculous, tangible work of God within, to those promises, covenants and prophecies without. Men are in awe of the first, but are more suited to the external relationship of the second.

Sarah laughed when at eighty she was told God would overcome her barrenness with the gift of life. She laughed and called that wondrous son, “Laughter,” in Hebrew, “Isaac,”(13) but she had wept earlier - we women know, she had wept before.

Rebekah - Isaac prayed for her and the Lord heard because she was barren.(14) Rachel cried out in bitterness to Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die!”(15) “And God remembered Rachel and hearkened to her, and opened her womb.” There is a fruitfulness other than biological. Ruth knew. Ruth walked away from the possibility of having a husband and a home filled with biological children when she left Moab and went to Judah with her mother-in-law, Naomi. (16). No Hebrew in his right mind would marry a Moabitess. It was another kind of fruitfulness that drew Ruth - it was to be joined to the one God that was first for her, and the rest she left in his hands. God overruled her choice of barrenness. Against all odds, she gained a husband and “the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.(17).

Ruth’s heart is bound with those silver cords of woman’s tears to the Virgin Mary. They understand each other. Both made a painful choice of physical barrenness in order to achieve a higher fruitfulness - to surrender completely to God. How much penance, weeping, begging, and believing God was poured into that surrender? And for both, Ruth and Mary, God miraculously gave a Child.

Hannah went with her husband to the Tent of God at Shiloh to beg God for fruitfulness. “She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, “O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life. . . .”

Hannah’s marvelously conceived son Samuel, anointed Ruth’s great-grandson David, King; just as Elizabeth’s marvelously conceived son, John, would anoint Mary’s Son Jesus, King of God’s Kingdom, but also the sacrificial “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World.”

“You will know them by their fruits.” We women recognize these women, and we know that fruitfulness of all kinds grows best in plowed ground. Our hearts are plowed. Broken - but fruitful with openness, warmth, expansiveness, clarity, and love. Fruitfulness, biological and spiritual, is our reason for being. But being so close to life hurts!

Our ancient Adversary impedes the call to our supernatural vocation of life; in Blessed. Edith’s words, “To enkindle sparks of love for God in others and fan them into greater brightness.” (19) Death stalks and carries away Life. Yet, ‘Woman’s duty is to struggle against evil and to prepare for the spiritual restoration of life.’(20)

The Scriptures abound in portraits of the grieving woman at the side of the dead child, when God in answer to her tearful prayers gives again a miraculous gift of new life. The widow of Zarephath’s cries out to Elijah for her dead son, and the boy is brought back to her with Elijah’s words, “See, your son lives.” Is it Elijah’s power more than the woman’s tears that restores life?

The Shunammite woman sets out without a word even to her husband to fetch Elisha to her dead son’s side. “Then Elisha went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his

hands upon his hands; and as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. . So he called her, and when she came to him, he said, ‘Take up your son.’ She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took up her son, and went out.”(22)

We watch the widow of Nain following the bier upon which lies her only son. Jesus says, “Young man, I say to you arise.’... And he gave him to his mother.” (23) And here is Mary weeping at her brother’s tomb - Jesus restores Lazarus to her embrace. (24). We recall the death of the young girl. Jesus says, “Do not weep,” and raises her to life. (25).

Women surround the bed of Dorcas, mourning; and Peter raises her (26.) At every raising from the dead in scripture, a woman, or women grieved, yet held faith in the goodness of God. And God restored life.

Jesus tells men and women to be like another woman who besought an unjust judge , ‘pray and never lose heart.’ She cried,

“Vindicate me against my adversary” For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, “Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.” ‘and the Lord said,’ Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night?

Is it just happenstance that Jesus chooses for his parable a widow woman to be the one who cries to God day and night? Is it just happenstance the vindication she seeks is against the Adversary, also called Satan in scripture? No, it is part of woman’s ethos to connect with the Life of God in order to counter Death. The cross extending from a circle is a symbol for woman whose poignancy the world cannot comprehend.

Consider Joan Andrews who writes out of a broken heart from prison over the death of so many unborn babies, “Lord, help us to do your perfect will and be a witness to help them see the sacredness of the precious babies . . . (28). Won’t her cries for life be heard? Already God is raising up men like Bishop Austin Vaughan and thousands of others in defense of the unborn because of her sorrow which led to such a profound dedication and self-giving.

Moische Rosen, Executive Director of Jews for Jesus, in pondering over the shallowness of our generation that would eliminate tears except for personal tragedy, supports the spiritual power of sorrow. “Sorrow is a dredge to the bottom of the soul. Sorrow deepens the channel of one’s personhood, that God’s grace might flow more deeply into it. Sorrow is the plow that rips the topsoil, that God’s seed might be planted and watered (29).

In his apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris*. Pope John Paul II capsulizes the power of the sorrow that pierced Mary’s heart as with a sword, “It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for grace which transforms human souls.” (30) is “Mary’s ascent of Calvary and her standing at the foot of the cross together with the beloved disciple” where she enter into a “special sort of sharing in the redeeming death of her son.”(31)

Woman is the agent of God’s life who transforms the worst that Death can do through her anguished but steadfast faith. The woman is Mary who, grieving for the fruit of her womb, her son, the Lamb of God, whose dead body she has helped take down from the cross, retires to some wilderness’ spot on the crucifixion eve. Ann Johnson in *Miryam of Judah* draws us into that secret contemplative place. It is Mary’s thoughts we share as she prepares her broken soul for the Sabbath with the mikvah ceremonial bath from which she arises with faith in the New Day(33)

My arms ache from the weight of him,
 it was just for a moment's time.
 They left me alone,
 holding him there,
 alone for one kind moment,
 his body resting, finally resting
 heavy on my knees,
 strange, bewildering shalom,
 but time was short. . .the sun on its downward
 course.

I watched them wrap him tenderly,
 entwining his body in clean linen,
 swaddled as I once swaddled his infant frame,
 enwrapped as he daily wrapped himself in his shawl
 of prayer,

I have left behind six days of striving,
 entering the seventh day reborn.
 I have left behind the touch of death,
 readying my soul for the day of God.

On that Sabbath morning, the day of God, Jesus rested in the grave, a second womb. But on the first day of the week, Jesus rose again from the dead. Though scripture does not speak of it, faith tells us that he appeared first to his mother. The sorrowing women who hastened to the tomb that morning to anoint his body witnessed the amazing fact - Jesus was risen. A woman's mourning was transformed by the power of God into joy.

The archetypal grief of woman that began when Death asserted his reign over Life had been vindicated and the Enemy vanquished. Women will carry this mystery as their own till the day dawns which the Apocalypse proclaims:

“Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” (34)

Footnotes

1. Genesis 3:15
2. Revelations 12:13
3. Ibid 12:14
4. Ibid 12:15
5. Stein, Edith; *The Collected Works, Vol Woman* ICS Publications, 1987 p.1191
6. I Tim 2:15, an alternative reading
7. deHueck Doherty, Catherine, *Poustinia Ave Maria*, 1975 p.89
8. Isaiah 54:1ff
9. Luke 1:34
10. Luke 23:28 1
11. Matthew 7:20
12. The theme of Pope John Paul I latest apostolic letter, *The Dignity of Women*
13. Genesis 18:1 31, 21:11

14. Ibid 2521
15. Ibid 30:1,221
16. Ruth 1:911
17. Ibid 4:13
18. I Samuel 1:9-20
19. Stein, op. cit. p.111
20. Ibid, p.69,188
21. I Kings 17:17-24
- 22.11 Kings 4:18-37
23. Luke 7:11-17
24. John 11:31-44
25. Luke 8:49-56
26. Acts 9:361
27. Luke 18:1-8
28. Andrews, Joan, "An Open Letter," Restoration Aug. '88
29. Moishe Rosen in September '88 Chariscenter Newsletter
30. Pope John Paul II, Salvifici Doloris VI,27
31. Ibid VI, 25
32. Haring, Bernard C.SS.R., Marv and Your everyday Life Liguori 1977, p.110
33. Johnson, Ann, Miryam of Judah: Witness in Truth and Tradftion, Ave Maria Press, 1987 p.101
34. Revelations 21:3-4

10 WHAT DID JESUS TELL US ABOUT WOMAN?

The woman's role in the family and the Church, inclusive language, female priesthood, the control of fruitfulness - controversy continues to swirl around woman. During the past year both Pope John Paul II and the American Bishops have responded to the ongoing issues feminism has raised with an Apostolic Letter, "On the Role and Dignity of Woman," and drafts of a bishops pastoral on woman.

All of which makes the woman and the man in the pew wonder, "What did Jesus say about woman's rightful role? What did he tell us about women?"

At first glance through the gospels one would conclude, "not very much." It is true as the Pope and the Bishops point out that Jesus included women as close confidants, perhaps against the social etiquette of the times; one thinks of Mary Magdalene; Mary and Martha; Joanna, another Mary, and those St. Luke lists as taking care of his needs.

He treated them with respect, obviously appreciating their talents and gifts, never denigrating them, and readily forgiving them for sins that religious authorities of his time would have punished. The woman taken in adultery, the woman with the flow of blood, the bent-over woman he healed on the Sabbath, the Syro-Phoenician woman with the possessed daughter readily come to mind. All these stories of his contacts with women are encouraging to twentieth century women under the pressures of further self-understanding and all have received much attention.

But what did Jesus really tell us about woman? Jesus is known for his enigmatic utterances. He was often asked direct questions which he circumvented. And the answers he did give we still ponder, wondering sometimes, just what he actually meant.

Some have thought they understand why Jesus is so lacking in cut and dried answers. C.S. Lewis feels that he didn't want us trusting in words, phrases, sentences that we could rattle off memorized, or in formulas to be applied to this or that situation. He forces us much deeper. He requires that we give ourselves to him, that we get caught up in his person. "His teaching therefore cannot be grasped by the intellect alone, cannot be 'got up' as if it were a 'subject'. If we try to do that with it, we shall find Him the most elusive of teachers He will not be pinned down."

Therefore, we must immerse ourselves in Jesus to answer our questions about woman. We do that, each one of us personally, in prayer and sacrament, and he will eventually make clear to us the woman he wants each of

us to be. But we can also immerse ourselves in him in the gospel - by seeing again factors in his life, choices that tell us directly about woman.

First, we look at the woman Jesus chose for his mother. We can say, "he chose," because unlike any other human being who has ever lived, we know Jesus as Second Person of the Trinity, did not only have a say, but formed, before and after her consent, the woman who would be his mother. This woman tells us volumes about Jesus' concept of the whole and holy woman.

In our day the Blessed Virgin Mary has also become the focus point for disagreement about woman's role. Her masculine strengths are more often enumerated; for example, she was not ruled by emotions, carefully questioning an angel; she was decisive, picking up and traveling three days journey after the annunciation; she was strong, riding a donkey nine months pregnant and delivering her baby in a stable far from family and friends; and she was resourceful, living in a foreign land with a new baby and unemployed husband.

Yet, the feminine outlines of her being are only enhanced by the recital of these qualities, for it is certainly true that Jesus chose a feminine woman who was obedient to God and submissive, in the best scriptural sense of that word, to her husband. Understanding of the sorrows it would entail, she said, "yes," to a life as Mother of God's own Son - and she, a fourteen year old betrothed girl! Though she had been given direct revelations by God unheard of to any other woman, the angelic warning to flee to Egypt came through Joseph, not to her, but she did not question. With all the prestige she might have claimed among the disciples, she lived in quiet obscurity for the rest of her life, letting all honor and glory go to her Son. We recognize such a life as similar to that women have known in all times and places, one of abject service to family and community.

She was a humble woman despite the temple education which tradition tells us elevated her above other women - she had memorized much scripture which echoes in her hymn of praise named the Magnificat which extolls the humble whom God raises up. Only five of her words are recorded, "Do whatever he tells you," which are certainly her direction to us for any question we might ask of her.

So what do we learn about woman's being because of Jesus' choice of Mary? Masculine strengths are essential to a whole and holy woman, but they are like the frame to the picture - the picture itself is one of humility, of trust, of acceptance, of submission and obedient service to others, willingly and knowingly, without complaint or demand. This is a role described many times by Jesus as the greatest important and honor in the Kingdom, all else is secondary. And this explains, as Blessed Edith Stein points out, why "He did not grant (women) priesthood, not even to His mother, Queen of Apostles, who was exalted above all humanity in human perfection and fullness of grace." His Mother is a complete portrait of the values that he elevated. It was to the servant of all that honor belonged. Jesus Himself exemplified the complete servant, and woman too is called especially to such a role by grace and by nature. It was to the least that being "first in the Kingdom" belonged. The least do not struggle for recognition, do not demand rights, or ask for honors. The heart of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed in word and deed calls all, men and women, to shun worldly prestige and power, and to take up the life of Jesus himself which means daily death-to-self and life-to-God.

Life-to-God means being sent by Him for others. The Latin words for "sent under," "sub" and "missa", because of the "me-first" emphasis of our modern culture, give us the most hated and feared word in Twentieth

Century English, “submission.” Woman’s natural role as wife and mother is the most complete example of this heart of the gospel. If she who is the matrix of the family turns away, who will understand or accept Jesus’ way? She is a key to understanding the Godly life elevated by Jesus.

So, Jesus tells us about woman’s role by presenting us to his mother and by the gospel he reveals through everything he teaches and is. But is there nothing more direct? Are there really no words in which he talks to women right out - something that puts the present Woman’s Movement in perspective?

There is.

In order to emphasize the supreme importance of this message to women, especially women who would ask the questions we ask 2000 years in the future, Jesus speaks strong words to women as his very last instruction to any group of people.

The scene is the terrifying one on the Via Dolorosa. Crowds eager for the thrill of watching torture press in on Jesus, bloody and weak, who has fallen twice. Not little stumbles, but because of the weight of the cross which encumber his arms, he falls smash his face to the ground. His nose is broken and bleeding which adds to the blood from his thorn-pierced brow, and his cheek bones are bruised and swelling. A young, strong, Simon has just been forced by the soldiers to carry his cross.

Gasping for breath, wobbling, Jesus is, nevertheless, fully conscious. He has been meditating on scripture all along the way - a section of Old Testament writing that has most to do with the meaning of woman in God’s eyes, the Book of the Prophet Hosea. How do we know that? Because, suddenly swimming into his troubled vision is a large group of women who stand out because they are not, like the others, pleasurably excited by the brutality. Rather, these women, are wailing and beating their breasts in anguish. His response to them is to speak from his meditation on the meaning of what is happening.

The context is awesome. Hosea was told by God to marry a prostitute. He really loved her, and though she betrayed him again and again, making him doubt even the paternity of his children, he continued to seek, find, and bring her home. God told the prophet that now he knew how God felt, because God’s “spouse,” Israel, had treated him the very same way. She had gone after false gods and had deserted her Husband. God couldn’t be sure that they were even His People anymore. Yet God with a sorrowing heart, loved them just the same.

All along the Via Dolorosa, Jesus had been relating to that. He had come as Bridegroom, but his Bride had rejected him to the point of seeing to it that he was killed. He had come with the promise of great fruitfulness to those who received him (a sexual analogy), but they would not open to him. To understand the relationship he desired with his people women were the key, just as a woman was the key for Hosea to understand the ways of God with his People. A vivid prophetic pronouncement formed in Jesus’ mind as he perceived where this all would lead. Listen to Jesus’s words as he turned to the women who bewailed and lamented him.

“Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, but for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

It is the last phrases that Jesus quotes from Hosea the ninth and tenth chapters. It is a passage in which Hosea understands that rejection of God means no fruitfulness for his people. Barrenness and death will rule; even if children come to be, they will sicken and die. If Israel depends on her false lovers, Israel will wither away. Fruitfulness of the spouse depends upon obedience and submission to the Lover-Husband. When a people are this sick they will long for death, so Hosea cries, "Hills cover us, mountains fall on us."

Jesus is the rejected God-Lover. Rejection has come to this - God's own people will kill him. "Ahh," says Jesus, and we paraphrase, "This is not the worst of it. Now the rebellious fire against God is in the green wood; the time will come when the wood will have dried out. Then rebellion will be like flames in tinder. You women will find this very difficult to believe, but in those days women will rebel against the functions of their bodies. So much will obedience and submission be scorned, fruitfulness will be denied. Women will be happier to have abortions than to bear children, they will feel blessed to use contraception and deny birth."

Such words would have been incomprehensible to those Hebrew women who believed that fruitfulness was the apex of feminine being. So has most of the world believed until our own century. The rebellion of women against their physical form and function would have been undreamt of, but with Jesus' full knowledge the most mysterious forecast he made of the future.

Are these words, especially in their context, revealing about Jesus' idea of woman, which is, after all, God's own idea of his creation of one half of the human race?

First on the agenda of the Woman's Movement has been "reproductive rights." Hinged to this is the freedom women supposedly want and need from ties to home and family, and the independence women want from men, also their desire to be like men, free and unencumbered in every way. Upon all of this rests the demand for "inclusive" language, and the obliteration of designations which refer to sex. These demands have been infecting, 80% of Catholic women of child-bearing age use contraception, if we believe the polls. Are we near to that time of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy?

How does Jesus view the Woman's Movement and its demands which have now moved into His Church? In *Mulieris Dignatatem, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*," Pope John Paul II has followed Jesus' own criteria. Now it is up to our Bishops who do not hold a trifling concern in their hands while they decide about the final draft of "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption">

11 JESUS' LAST PROPHECY

The scene is one of tumult and horror; in the midst of the clamor, solemn words are about to be spoken that will not find their meaning for twenty centuries. An innocent man, victim of Roman flogging and soldiers' torture, bleeding from head to foot, staggers between uneven lines of jeering, gesticulating people who are intent on the brutality at hand. His arms tied to the heavy beam make him unable to break a fall. He has fallen twice, his face smashed upon the rough stones of the street, his nose broken. A sturdy man from the country, Simon of Cyrene, has just been forced by the soldiers to carry the wooden beam because he can no longer bear it up and walk.

Gasping for breath, wobbling, Jesus is, nevertheless, fully conscious. In fact, despite the pain and terror, he has been meditating on the prophecy of Hosea which explains it all. No one in the Hebrew Bible had expressed the meaning of this scene more accurately than the great prophet of eight hundred years earlier.

Hosea loved Gomer his wife enough to rescue her again and again from her addiction to prostitution. He didn't even know if his children were really his own, yet he went out, purchased her back from the religious cult where she worked, and brought her home. God told Hosea that now he knew God's heartbreak, because that was how God's beloved, Israel, had treated him; she too had gone after other lovers. Now, Jesus looks at the thrill-seeking mob. These contorted faces belong to him specially. He was sent on this mission for them, each one. He has loved them, each one. He is their intended Bridegroom, they are his Bride. Rejected, he is handed over to death by the Bride who prefers anything, anyone, to him; and though he has the power to do otherwise, willingly he will die for her even while she despises him.

Who is this "she?" It is the Israelite people who for two thousand years have been prepared in explicit sexual terms to consider themselves the spouse of God. Consistently and without deviation he has revealed himself to them as masculine to feminine, as Husband to Beloved. They know the language well.

The Hebrews had only a sexual term to describe what it was like to be known by God and to know him. "Knowing" was not a head trip, it was not information stored in the brain, it was not an intellectual exercise at all; it was instead a thoroughly personal and intense experience that involved the whole person. A theophany with God, surprising enough to us, was identified with sexual intercourse. The Hebrew language had no place for abstractions; it was concrete, and the same term, *yada*, was used both for the sex act and for the experience of a personal encounter with the Lord God. It was a way of thinking, and a language of expressing thought, specifically chosen by God when he chose these people, because it best expressed in human terms the reality of the original relationship of God to mankind. Upon that sexuality

concept is based the symbolic nature of ordained priests as representatives of the masculine love which God-Christ epitomizes when he becomes one flesh with his Bride in the Eucharist. We use that chosen language in theology and liturgy because of its relationship to Revelation.

When John the Baptist had pointed out Jesus to his own disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God," he also identified him as "the Bridegroom." Jesus used the term about himself. Every Israelite knew what that meant. God through the prophets had stated to Israel, "I am your Husband." Jesus was claiming that kind of kinship. The Hebrew considered the very meaning of sexual interrelationship to have to do with what the right relationship to God was - like a Bride they were to be surrendered to their Creator. Dependent upon him, they were to receive Him in order to be fruitful; the stance of obedience and submissiveness, in the best sense feminine, was to be descriptive of their trust and love. On the other hand, a harlot or disobedient woman was a sign of the way they rejected their Divine Lover. The term "harlot" described them when they entertained false loves which was the apostasy of worshipping pagan gods and goddesses, or the love of material wealth and the adulation of men, or the trust in other foreign powers and weaponry for their well-being and safety. God himself uses this sexual analogy in the revelation he gives through Hosea:

Rejoice not, O Israel! . . . for you have played the harlot, forsaking your God.
 You have loved a harlot's hire upon all threshing floors.
 They became detestable like the thing they loved. Ephraim's [name for
 Israel's] glory shall fly away like a bird -
 no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! Give them, O Lord, what wilt thou
 give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.
 The high places of Aven [false worship], the sin of Israel shall be destroyed.
 Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars; and they shall say to the
 mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall upon us.

All along the Via Dolorosa, Jesus had been relating to Hosea's prophetic life and words. Swimming into his troubled vision is a large group of women who stand out because they are not gloating over the impending agony of his death. Rather, these women are wailing and beating their breasts in anguish for him. His response is to stop and quote from Hosea, adding a last, vivid, prophetic pronouncement:

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but for yourselves and for
 your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say,
 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts
 that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall
 on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is
 green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Rejection and rebellion has come to this - God's chosen Bride has betrayed him. Says Jesus (paraphrasing), "this is not the worst of it. By killing me, this generation's rebellion against God is like a fire in the green wood; it is slow burning, without much heat. However, the time will come when the wood will be dry. You Hebrew women who so revere the God's creative and nurturing power in your bodies, will not believe those times. Then women like yourselves, the monad of godly obedience, will rebel against their very meaning they will rebel against the functioning of their bodies. Fruitfulness will be spurned. In those days, women will be happier to have abortions than to bear children, they will feel blessed to use contraception and deny conception and birth. These will be the days of dry wood! Beware the fire of those days."

It was the most mysterious prophecy of Jesus and hardly understandable until our own day.

We who are slow of mind and heart to believe, must believe this - that the day of this prophecy is upon us. The Holy Father has warned about the effects of militant feminism and its ideological isolation that has taken a disastrous toll on the family and thereby on society at large, he has decried the "crisis of maternity." Yet much of the Catholic press does not throw its weight behind him, but continues to encourage and promote feminism.

Margaret Obrien Steinfelds, editor of a prominent Catholic magazine, in a much publicized speech extols this feminism that scorns "language (in the Church) that tries to maintain a separate place for woman, an idealized image of her role as mother and her nurturing, maternal qualities" and she applauds "gender as of declining significance" brought about by "technology - - minimizing the differences. - . affording a degree of control over reproduction."

While 300,000 women, many of them Catholic, march for abortion rights, and twenty-four nuns sign a newspaper ad questioning the Church's official position on abortion, even notorious Erica (*Fear of Flying*) Jong chides feminism for not only being "indifferent to the problem of mothers, but downright hostile to children and childbearing. The focus has been on reproductive freedom, on women's having career paths identical to those of men - despite the fact that women can have such career paths only if they choose never to have children."

From the mother of modern feminism, Simone deBeauvoir, has passed on an abhorrence of sexual intercourse as exploitation of women; "the very posture of receptivity means slavery." Contempt for men and elevation of lesbianism has nearly completed the raging circle of fire. These attitudes will be passed on to the next generation, as Mary Hunt, Catholic "theologian" and professed lesbian declares, "We are committed agents for social change. The future of Woman-Church rests with our children. The education of our children is now a serious and important priority for us. When the Pope was here recently, the most frightening part of his otherwise stock-in-trade message was that Catholic schools should be kept pure from the likes of us. . . It signals the need to create . . . centers, schools, think-tanks, retreat centers, theological centers, where feminist approaches would be normative. I believe it is the students of those schools. . . who will be at our conference in 2037."

Said Jesus," ...weep for yourselves and for your children, for the days are coming....

The only piece left to fit into the prophetic picture is that the One Triune God who uses the sexuality he created to reveal himself as masculine (Pure Spirit, but to our sense- dependent understanding masculine, nevertheless) is now finally rejected; the pagan goddess rises through the smoke of Catholic feminist "theology" to take his place; Such sheer heresy can be found promoted in another Catholic magazine that enters nearly 400,000 Catholic homes, when a nun, it's assistant book editor, mourns that the earlier pagan goddesses were overcome by the Hebrew patriarchal God, as though a greater had been usurped by a lesser.

"Then," said Jesus, "they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.'

12 ST. PAUL'S APOSTOLIC TEACHING ON WOMAN:

Naturally personified in the Blessed Virgin Mary

Part I

Have you ever imagined carrying on a conversation with a saint? I frequently talk things over with one in my head. If he has written about something that touches my heart, I question him further. Because she has done the will of God so well, I ask her how to know His will.

Over the years in my growth as a woman I have frequently engaged St. Paul in reverent questioning (his words are Holy Scripture), and have slowly developed awe at his understanding of woman. Therefore, my saint-conversations were wakened anew on this topic when I encountered Blessed Edith Stein in her writings.

Edith Stein questions St. Paul. Blessed Edith Stein a philosopher, teacher and convert from Judaism to Catholicism, was also a clearheaded woman involved in the first wave of feminism in this century. Certainly she understood feminism in a way lost to us half a century later; she, no doubt, would disclaim the name of "feminist" because it negates all she held dear. In a collection of her lectures and essays on the role and meaning of woman, she too had some questions to pose St. Paul about the enigmatic paragraphs on women in I Corinthians 11:

We should not be deemed disrespectful to the Apostle if we suggest here that in this instruction to the Corinthians, there is confusion as to the divine and human aspects, the temporal and eternal. Coiffure and clothes are matters of fashion, as even St. Paul says in the close of the passage: "But anyone who may still be inclined to argue knows that we do not have such a custom nor do the churches of God" If this judgment regarding the dress to be worn for public worship by the Corinthian women was binding for the community he had founded, that is not to say that by the same token it is also binding for all times. (1)

And later, after discussing more of Paul's writings about women, she writes concerning II Timothy's strong teachings about woman's place in the Christian assembly:

Here, even more strongly than in the Letter to the Corinthians, one has the impression that the original order and the redemptive order are subordinated by the order of fallen nature, and that the Apostle still expresses himself distinctly as a Jew in the spirit of the law. (2)

Blessed Edith Stein is not the only woman of faith to have stumbled over St. Paul's teachings and gone away feeling he somehow had not wholly carried through on his Christian convictions. With the second wave of feminism of the past thirty years, more and more criticism has been leveled against his teaching on woman, and he is blamed more than anyone for the perceived injustices women have suffered in the Church.

This is the point I would like discuss with Blessed Edith, because I believe insights are coming to light that put St. Paul's teachings in a new and wholly acceptable light, especially when we learn to see them as descriptive of the perfect woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Edith Stein accepts wholeheartedly the Bible's revelation about the meaning of sexuality, never hesitating about the headship given the man, nor the supportive, responsive role of the woman. She loves the Virgin Mother to the point of giving up secular life to live her way in the Carmelite Order. It is the harshness with which the Apostle seems to lay down the old Jewish law that troubles her.

The Basic Premise. In order to clarify both St. Paul and Edith's concerns, we must start with the firm, orthodox premise that is accepted by both of them. This will take us into some theologically deep water, but it is completely within the Christian's comprehension, and essential for understanding what is at stake in the present controversy over woman's role that so threatens Church unity. Both St. Paul and Blessed Edith clearly saw and taught that before discussing any Christian relationship, especially role and meaning of the sexes, that there are three orders to be grasped:

The first is the *Original Order* that God intended perfectly;

The second is the order that resulted because of the Fall - that is, the order of the Law ("your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"); *the Fallen Order*.

The third is the *Redemptive Order*, in which we now strive to live as Christians. Stein writes: "The redemptive order restores the original relationship. . . (3)

We must grasp the great gulf between the original plan of God and what we experience in this life - the order under which this world operates is *The Fallen Order* and is not according to God's Perfect Plan, His *Original Order*. *The Original Order* is restored (even further enhanced) by Jesus Christ's redeeming sacrifice. The order set up by the Redeemed Community (that is, the community of those who accept Jesus' forgiveness and begin to live a life in the Holy Spirit) must hope to mirror what God originally intended for his creation. When we appropriate this basic truth, we begin to understand that authority/submission as we see it in the fallen world is not what is intended by St. Paul and the apostolic writers when in the context of the redeemed community they use those words "authority" or "submission." They use these words as they are seen in Jesus Christ, and no other way.

The concepts of authority and submission are thoroughly perverted in this fallen world. We see authority routinely and ruthlessly turned to power and prestige of the few over the many. We experience submission as abject degradation of the human person trampled by the greed and lust of the powerful. Out of such disorder come revolutions and rebellions. In *the Restored Order* authority is not domination, and submission is not subservience. Let us see how this can be.

With the Original Order we focus on the perfect picture of the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. In the encyclical "Dominum et Vivificantem" John Paul II wrote about that oft used passage, "let us

make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Can one hold that the plural which the Creator uses here in speaking of himself already in some way suggests the Trinitarian mystery, the presence of the Trinity in the work of the creation of man?

Parallels - Initiator and Respondent. Placing man and woman in their original perfection and viewing their relationship to the Trinity of Divine Persons we find many striking parallels about God's intent for their relationship in the Original Order. First, in the created unity of man and woman, like the uncreated unity of Persons of the Trinity there is an initiator and a responder (which also establishes an overall relationship of Initiator and responder which is Creator and creature). In the Holy Trinity the Father initiates and the Son responds. The Father sends, the Son is sent. In the parallel human unity, man initiates and woman responds. Thus, the Father through the Son creates all things even as the creature made in the First Person image, the man, creates (secondarily) through the woman. (In another writing, *Original Unity of Man and Woman*, John Paul II plumbs these two accounts in Scripture with the intricacies of his philosophic understanding.)

Dependent but equal. Thus the Son, co-existent and co-eternal to the Father, is dependent upon the Father, even as the woman created simultaneously with the man (the first creation story, Gen.1 :26-27) is dependent upon the man (the second creation story, Gen.. 2:21-21. These two stories each tell important truths with many layers of meaning. One is an overview, the other a close-up; they do not intend to contradict each other, but each adds important insights not perceivable in the other story alone.) The *dependency* of the woman in this sense does not imply inequality. The two, man and woman, are equal in their unity as the Father and Son are equal in their unity.

Polar Persons and the Person of Unity. Their roles of initiation and response reveal them to be polar or opposites - opposites not in terms of opposition, but in terms of the relationship of two who face each other. We might use the word complementary, but for this facing from polar positions, I prefer “ob-positioned.” Secondly, between these ob-positioned persons there is a Person who is their necessary unity. St. Bernard wrote, “The Holy Spirit is the kiss between the Father and the Son.” In the Original order we understand the Holy Spirit is also the holy kiss between the man and the woman. The Holy Spirit was given to ob-positioned man and woman to be their unity, and in the Redeemed order, man and woman are again united in Holy Matrimony by the Holy Spirit.

The Order of the Fall saw the Law imposed by God. Disagreeable and harsh, but necessary, it replaced the rejected Holy Spirit's love in holding man and woman together. Today we experience what happens when the Law is ignored and discarded in the Fallen realm and the Holy Spirit is never invited to take its place - wholesale disintegration and degradation of the meaning of sexuality and the relationship of man and woman.

Answering the sexuality questions. Many other questions about the meaning of sexuality, male and female, are thus simply answered. Meditating on the roles of the persons of the Holy Trinity, on their non-exchangeable places, on the equality of the two poles of initiation and response; that is, the creation of man to image the Father, and woman to image the Son, finally reveals the truth about the sexes. A certain obscurity develops when we realize that the woman's role in mankind images the Son's role in the Holy Trinity. But this will vanish if we remember that sexuality is a created material manifestation made by God to express what in himself is purely

spiritual. There is no sexuality implied in the words "Father" and "Son." But creating an image of their relationship to each other, these Divine Persons made creatures whose sexuality materializes in flesh that unique spiritual relationship. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. - 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'"(5)

Wives submit, husband love. In imaging the Father and the Son, the man loves the woman as the Father loves the Son - giving everything he has to the woman, creating a new generation through the woman; and the woman responds to that love by willing the husband's will just as the Son's love is shown in his willing the Father's will. Only in the climate of the pure love of the Holy Spirit is such a relationship truly heaven for both participants. In the Original order, man and woman were held in the embrace of the Holy Spirit - pure, self-giving love, and therefore. . . heaven. Hence, the apostolic exhortation of wives submit, and husbands love must be apparent in the Redeemed Order, just as it is in the Original Order. It is not the hell often observed in the sick distortions experienced in the fallen world. Submission in the Redeemed Order is the essence of the stance of the Second Person of the Trinity, who "though he was in the form of God, did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." Who among the children of Adam and Eve stands out as exemplar of this submission? Holy Mary.

Headship, another apostolic teaching, is the essence of the First Person, the Father, to whom Christ gave unequivocal obedience. Man and woman in marriage are the human three-in-one meant to reflect that perfect relationship, the Holy Spirit condescending to be the Third Person in their union. Mary, who received the most perfect of all gifts from God, knowing intimately the union with the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, gave Joseph headship over herself and her family.

The Second Person comes as male. Our Lord Jesus is the incarnation of the Second Person. Within the Triune Unity of Godhead it is the Second Person who manifests the feminine attributes of wholehearted response. Why then did God choose male embodiment for the Second Person and not female? The Bible also helps us answer that.

Through all the years in many cultural settings, the Word of God's consistent description of his relationship to his people is as male to female. That is, God is Father, Bridegroom, Husband, and Lover; and never presents himself to be Mother, Bride, Wife or Beloved. The Israelites expected the "Bridegroom" to come, their messiah, sent by the One who had told them, "Your maker is your husband." They expected a manifestation of the One who expressed his desire to "know" them as "Adam knew Eve and she conceived." The usual verb, "to know" in Hebrew (yada) is the verb for sexual intercourse. The consistent message of sexuality was known by the Israelite to be a message of the love of God for mankind. They recognized he had made them to be his Spouse, and that they would again be brought into union with him as Bride, washed from their infidelity. Therefore, God-in-human- flesh came as male - The Initiator! The Author! Without whom we can do nothing. It is inconceivable that he do otherwise. All the carefully layered analogic meaning of relationship between God and mankind would be scrambled into an indecipherable heap were the meaning of sex abandoned in the sending of the Second Person. With the same mark of Original Order, the Holy Spirit comes upon the holy woman and she conceives the Christ. All Persons of the Holy Trinity come to us dependent humans, as masculine to feminine.

It remains for another time and place to discuss the feminine attributes of Godhead, which are surely his, because all holy relationship possible is there. But even affirming the feminine attributes of Godhead, we must not make the mistake of believing that God has ever presented himself to mankind as feminine. It is impossible that he do so. It totally confuses the order he so carefully inscribed in human sexuality and *its significance* of our final end as Bride.

ST. PAUL'S APOSTOLIC TEACHING ON WOMAN:

Naturally personified in the Blessed Virgin Mary

Part II

St. Paul teaches against this background. It is with this essential background firmly in place that the teaching of St. Paul about man and woman and their relationship makes sense. Without these basic principles somewhat comprehended, it is impossible to see the eternal wisdom in his words. Though there is dispute among scholars about the Apostle's authorship of some of the letters, I and II Timothy, and Titus especially, we will accept the Church's traditional belief that they are St. Paul's writing, or in the case of the last three, in important ways Pauline.

The equality of man and woman. First, Paul never doubts the equality of man and woman, though he firmly denies that this means anything like the dictionary definition, "the same as, in all regards." It cannot mean that - regardless of their complete Godhead in all aspects, the Father and the Son are not *the same in all regards*. We will see in discussing various passages that man and woman are equal in worth before God, they share all the same attributes, but some of those attributes are more to be said of the one than the other, even as the early Athanasian Creed implied when it stated concerning the Divine Persons, "We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, *neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance*." That special emphasis determines God's image in man and woman to be reflected in their roles in his plan. And their roles have to do with non-exchangeable order. Order - that is, A followed by B does not mean A is superior and B is inferior.

Galatians 3:28, baptism and the equal gift of grace. In presenting St. Paul's total acceptance of the equality of man and woman, the oft quoted verse from Galatians 3:28 is the place to start. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." St. Paul knew well that baptism confers exactly the same redeeming grace upon every individual regardless of sex, nationality or status in the social order. Yet, baptismal waters do not change or wash away sexual differentiation; and that differentiation by the Creator is not meaningless either before baptism or afterward.

I Corinthians - Equal access to sex. In I Corinthians St. Paul lays out a startling proposal for the time. Men and woman in marriage are to have equal claim to each others bodies. We are endlessly told that St. Paul reflects a misogynist culture, but here he places the woman's rights first! "The husband should give to his wife her

conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.”(7)

Later on in the same letter, St. Paul in an aside reiterates that “in the Lord woman is not independent of man, or man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman.”(8) He thus states their equality before the Lord; they are mutually dependent and one does not have more value than the other.

I Corinthians 11 - Equality not interchangeability. However, equality does not mean that the one can take the other's position in the godly order into which they are set. Just as the Son does not take the Father's role, but consistently “does only what he sees the Father doing,” so the woman's role is, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to follow the headship of her husband. “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.’ Both man and woman have a head - neither is without the requirement of obedience formative to their Christian identity. This does not mean that woman receives her salvation through her husband. St. Paul would be shocked at the suggestion. He fully intends, as all his writings on salvation attest, that each person come to salvation in a personal encounter with Christ and self-giving to Christ directly. He simply lines out the godly order for a man and his wife that has been taught him by Christ.

This is the Tradition of Christ. The few sentences just ahead of this instruction about headship in the eleventh chapter of Corinthians are very important, with special attention given to the words I have italicized in the following: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain *the traditions* even as I have *delivered* them to you.” The word translated “imitators” might better be translated “followers.” “Be *followers* of me, as I am of Christ.” And the *traditions* he speaks of are not cultural, they *are from Christ directly*. These are *the apostolic traditions* maintained by the Catholic Church that separate it from most other Christian churches. And among these *traditions*, the role of woman is clearly delineated - she is to be submissive to her husband in the sense that Christ Jesus is submissive to the Father, she is not to hold headship in the Church, even as Christ Jesus, the Son, does not hold headship in the Trinity. The reasonableness of this will become clearer as we proceed.

By verse 23 of the same chapter St. Paul repeats how the *traditions of Christ* are passed on, this time in regard to the Eucharist. Keep in mind that this letter was written before any of the four gospels were circulated. The sacred Eucharistic words of Consecration were being passed on strictly by apostolic tradition. St. Paul himself was not present at that initial meal that instituted the Eucharist in the Upper Room. Rather, he received these words, as well as the instruction for women that begins this section of his letter, “from the Lord” in mystical experience. “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said. . .”

This means that when we read in the 16th verse of this same sequence, “If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God,” we must take the words very seriously. They have come down through authorized tradition from Christ himself in a solemn passing on, or handing down. In both instances, the tradition of the Eucharistic consecration and the tradition of headship, the Greek words denote an official, authorized delivering of the tradition. The subject of the stern injunction of the 16th verse is woman's role

in the church which is in danger of losing its vital signness because of general downplaying and disregard of this solemn tradition.

The sign that woman is. What is this signness? The word means what we would suppose. A sign points in a direction and tells us how to proceed to a destination. Without the sign we would lose our way. How many times have we looked for street signs in a strange city and gone in circles till we finally came across one that meant something. The Bible proclaims from beginning to end that woman is a SIGN. If the sign points awry like Eve, the whole community is in confusion. If the sign points truthfully like Mary, the community travels in harmony toward God. To be this sign, the woman must maintain faithfully for God's sake the role that she has been given - that is, intelligent, willed self-giving, which is *submission to headship*. In this she imitates the Son's obedience to his Father and sets the tone of obedience to God's will that must mark the entire Christian community. She does this not because she is domineered into doing so, but because she understands, has received the gifts necessary from the hand of the Lord, and chooses to be what he wants. St. Paul may or may not have known Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, but she is unavoidably the clear example in living flesh of the Signness he expects woman to be in the Redeemed Order.

The criterion of fruits. The consistent way of determining a follower of Christ, one who is filled with the Holy Spirit, is to put that person against the yardstick of Jesus' criterion. "You will know them by their fruits." When we analyze this test we recognize that the analogy upon which it rests is a sexual one, a feminine one. Fruitfulness comes from sexual activity in all realms of nature, including the realm of human persons. Fruitfulness in Our Lord's mind was not limited to childbearing - we can be sure he meant the fruits of the Holy Spirit; but the principles on all levels, biological to spiritual, are the same.

The life discerned for its fruitfulness must be open to the Spirit, thus receiving, in the intimate terms of *yada*, the personal invasion of the Spirit of love whose union with the beloved fructifies the natural capability and produces the fruits of the Spirit of which Our Lord speaks. Therefore, every Christian soul (sexuality had nothing to do with it - male or female) is to be viewed as feminine before the action of the Holy Spirit whose action on the soul is forever masculine. With the "yes" of the soul to union with the Spirit comes forth fruit a hundredfold. St. Paul lists these in Galatians 5:22; "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law."

And how does one receive the Holy Spirit's loving attention? The spirit must be humble, accepting, open, receiving, obedient and submissive. Who in the Christian community is the abiding sign of this yielded attitude or stance? Who is the sign of what surrender to the impregnating one brings about? The woman. If woman loses her way in the redeemed community, the whole community will be back into the confusions of the Fallen order. It will be as though there has not been the salvation of Jesus. None of his protestations of obedience and submission to the will of his Father will have been appropriated into the Christian community. "If you love me, obey. . ." Love will be doubted by lack of observance to the rest of his command.

Woman's vital importance The woman is that important! This is why we so honor The Woman, Mary. She was the first to show humankind the way. She is the First Sign. It was prophesied to be so from the first in the story of Adam and Eve. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall

bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.”(9) As Blessed Edith writes, woman has been given “a particular duty to struggle against evil and to prepare for the spiritual restoration.” (10)The Virgin Mary is that prototype woman.

Misunderstanding the Spirit. But St. Paul was faced with something quite different in those early Church communities, which were like charismatic prayer groups. The woman who had been brought to new life through the personal salvation offered in Jesus and then filled with the Spirit, was misunderstanding the democratic action of the Spirit which came down on men and women alike. She was immediately tempted to ignore the sign of obedience, of heartfelt submission of will to another her sex was to be. She was tempted (and I do not use the word loosely) to envy the role of authority as though it were superior. . . just as Eve had in the Garden of Perfection. She was deserting her crucial place and attempting to take the headship of the community, thus aping again the fallen value of Satan that headship was prestigious and her own obedience degrading. We see this confusion in the rest of the I Corinthians reading, it was a dangerous situation that demanded apostolic correction.

Veils and hair length in I Corinthians 11. If there is a place in his letters that St. Paul might like to rewrite, I believe it would be this eleventh chapter. He becomes tangled up in hair lengths and veils, but underlying his botchy handling of this purely cultural phenomenon, he does not lose his grasp of principles as Blessed Edith feared. Yet, we must dig for them. We must decipher the meaning of hair lengths and veils. Long hair seems to have spoken of a woman's modest beauty, and a veil was a sign of a woman's submission to the headship of her husband. Wearing the veil proclaimed that this woman was under the protection and guidance of her husband by her own choice. This is wholly in accord with both Original order, and the order of the Redeemed community. With this meaning in mind, obviously a man wearing a veil would bring dishonor on his head by proclaiming that he did not assume his responsibilities of protection and guidance, but instead rejected the role God called him to. Therefore the man prophesies or speaks the word of God to his community with his head uncovered. A woman, however, who prophesies unveiled, that is, outside of her husband's authority - without his permission and guidance, is behaving like a man though she is not one, and is a sign to the community that points them all to disobedience - a very potent and destructive sign of overturned allegiance.

The phrase, “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man” is a tricky one. I take it to be simply a rephrasing about the order that was laid out by Paul in the first sentence of the section, “The head of every man is Christ, etc.” because there is overall in St. Paul's writing so much emphasis on equality. It parallels the second creation story but does not take heed of the first. Both Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 5:1-2 state male and female are created in the image of God, while the emphasis of Genesis 2:21-25 portrays the equal but dependent relationship. Paul knew this well. Yet, the man's rightful pride in his wife, that he glory in her feminine grace and beauty, is not a lack of correct understanding of their relationship. The First Person glories in the Second Person. God glories in his creature mankind we are told in the psalms, and we know the Father gloried in his Son, “Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased.” (11)

Because of the angels. That the woman should have a veil on her head , which means to be under her husband's authority, “because of the angels,” found in I Corinthians 11:10 is another cryptic statement that can only be explained by laying it alongside another statement of St Paul. Written to this same charismatic fellowship in

Corinth that was finding the order of men and women such a struggle, this second reference is in the Second Letter to the Corinthians. Here Paul is furious (read chapters 10-13) with the rebelliousness by new leadership toward his apostolic authority, and in light of the first letter we may safely assume that women or a woman was the center of a takeover. He picks up the sexual analogy so common in scripture when he writes, "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am *afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve* by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (12)

The serpent is, of course, Satan (the one who is "set over against"), the deceiver of Eve. He is the chief of the fallen angels. Had Eve heeded her husband's headship, had she been veiled, in St. Paul's terms, not deciding for herself that "the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise," (13) Satan's temptation would have been foiled. It is true that, as Blessed Ed notes, "The nature of the temptation was in itself of greater significance for her." (14) The rebellious fallen spirit of the universe knew how to tempt the common denominator of obedience, the woman, and he had to tempt her to disobedience or his bitterness alone would never break Perfection into ruin. Obedience must be thrown out. That cry echoes loudly today. Woman, the sign of obedience, must be tempted away from her crucial place, for then the whole created world of men is subject to Satan's oppressions. And so it happened then, and is threatening to happen now.

ST. PAUL'S APOSTOLIC TEACHING ON WOMAN:

Naturally personified in the Blessed Virgin Mary

Part III

The Christian community tempted. St. Paul sees the very same temptation of the Garden of Eden in all its ugliness rising in the newly formed Christian community. Woman must not shun her obedient role so like Christ's, she must not mistake her salvation to mean that male and female have like roles in the fellowship - a very dangerous misunderstanding. Therefore, she must be under her husband's veil because of the danger of the angels. . . The *Disobedient Angel and his hosts*.

Though hair lengths and veils are certainly merely cultural fashions that come and go just as Blessed Edith complains, St. Paul well understands the underlying principles he seeks to explain. We may wish a woman had been at his elbow to help him phrase it. Yet there is nothing untruthful about his exposition.

At the end of the first letter after further attempts to reorder the charismatic exuberance that has broken out in Corinth since his departure (because of the influence of recently baptized Apollos who came to Corinth with all of the enthusiasm of the newly Spirit-filled), Paul gets back to the heart of the disorder problem – woman. Attempting to take over leadership - which must be the reason of his shrieking so about her “speaking in church” - she has become an anti-sign of disunity and disobedience to God. He loses his cool head because he recognizes the spirit who, behind the scenes and again through the woman, tries to manipulate the community. Yet, he is nonpulsed to be able to explain it. He already tried, and must know that veils and hair entrapped him the first time around. So he just lays down the rule “writing a command of the Lord.”(15) as his rank of apostle empowers him to do. We must, therefore, take these words seriously. Paul is not one to pull rank unless he is sure. Many times he explains his stands as “concessions” not “commands,” or as his personal understanding and not a word directly from the Lord. But in this case he claimed from the first that this teaching about woman's role was from *the tradition he received from Christ*, so he says order of headship and woman's subordinate role in leadership is “a command of the Lord, If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized”(as being part of the community of Christ).(16) We already know from the earlier instruction in this letter that woman may prophesy, that is, she may speak God's word to the congregation, she is “veiled.” However, the women or woman to whom these words are addressed is out of order, she is not under headship, she is a sign of disobedience and antinomianism - the most fearful and fateful disease of a community that is called to unity in the Holy Spirit

Order in marriage Ephesians 5:2 The most clear of his teachings on marital order and its ultimate meaning is the famous passage from Ephesians 5. As Pope John Paul II has emphasized in *Mulieris Dignitatem* the whole context of the teaching lies in the first sentence, "Be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ." It seems that *subject* is not the best verb for this exhortation. *Subject* means literally "to be thrown under." Submit would be the better word, "to be sent under." Jesus was sent under by the Father; it was entirely appropriate for his role. And we, his followers, are sent under. That means that we are sent with subdued self-will to do a task in cooperation with the will of God. There is a positive connotation. Those whom God sends under, he equips to do the task he sends them to do.

Submission of both. Both men and women are to be submissive, each one to the other. However, the woman is the first to enter wholeheartedly into this attitude, because her demonstrable submission is to the headship of her husband. His submission to her, which is just as demanding, is to take up the responsibilities of headship - to provide for, protect and lead her and their children - a role of abject service, but not always clearly discerned to be so. St. Paul parallels the husband's role with the work of Christ for the Church. It is not an easy work! Again the sexual analogy is the strong framework of his argument. (Note that these are analogies and not metaphors. An analogy has a real relationship between the two things being compared, where a metaphor is a loose construction. There is a real relationship here that speaks truth on all levels). Christ is the husband, the Church is the wife. It is the same correlation seen throughout scripture when the analogy of marriage is used for God and his people. Paul accepts it totally. By far the most instructions in this text are given to the husband to prepare him for wholehearted submission to his role in relation to his wife. The submission on his part demands the same sacrifice that Christ made for his bride. Headship may degenerate into domination and authoritarianism in the fallen world scheme, but it must not demonstrate any such attitudes in the community that calls itself after Christ, the family and the Church.

Two become one. The man needs *to leave all* to become one with his wife. "The two shall become one." Paul well understands how two polar persons become one. He explains it thoroughly in the third chapter of Ephesians where he exalts unity. "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility . . . that he might create in himself one new man in the place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God . . . in one Spirit to the Father."(17) Again, it takes three for the two to be one - two reconciled in one Spirit. Jesus himself told us this when discussing marriage saying, "What God has joined together let not man put asunder," (two joined by the Spirit)(18) and in his last prayer with the apostles, "that they be one, Father, even as we are one."(19) From Trinitarian theology we know how the Father and Son are one - in the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches that the source of unity is the Spirit; we are called to "*maintain the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace."(20)

All told, St. Paul closes his Ephesian emphasis on the unity of man and woman as the sign to the Christian community of Christ and the Church with these strong words, " . . .the two shall become one. This is a great mystery and I take it to mean Christ and the Church." We are attempting to unravel that mystery, at least a little. Man and woman, it seems clear, were created to be just such a Sign. Together in sexual union, they image the reality of their Maker, the relationship of ecstasy and creativity of the Holy Triune Unity, and to image at the same time the

ecstatic, creative union God intended with his created Beloved, mankind, from the beginning. Always the mysterious union is achieved through a Third, the Holy Spirit.

Written within the same few days as Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Colossians phrases the teaching more simply. Wives, be subject (that word again in the RSV when "be submissive" or "submit" would be better) and husbands love.

Challenges to apostolic authority. When we come to the Pastoral Epistles, Paul's tone does harden. The challenges to apostolic authority were growing in the early Church; we read this in all of the later pastoral letters. In his second letter, St. John describes the same difficulty of an antinomian religious leader refusing to recognize his place as apostolic head just as Paul experienced it in Corinth. The "direct-pipeline" folks, in misunderstanding their charismatic gifts were being tempted back into disobedience. As elsewhere, women, so essentially the sign of right order and obedience to God's command, were central to the upheaval. Though Blessed Edith expressed some doubts about it, even these stern injunctions written to Timothy and Titus about pastoral care of women are decipherable. They round out the understanding about the role and meaning of woman in God's plan.

Woman's physical appearance I Timothy 2:9 The very appearance of the Christian woman should speak about her heart condition as one of the "little ones" of God. Therefore, Christian women must stay away from those manifestations that St. John labels "all that is the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." No, the woman of God may be adorned, but modestly in seemly apparel, and not with expensive, exotic hairstyles and jewelry. The reason is integral to her meaning. She is the embodiment of the heart of the Gospel - again the sign of it. Elegant, lofty, arrogant exteriors cannot speak of humble, obedient and sweetly yielded interiors. St. Peter in his teaching on feminine adornment adds, "let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." It is the only way we can conceive of the Holy Mother adorning herself.

A learner, not a teacher This woman is also, as the whole community must be, a learner more than a teacher. She is a heeder before she is a giver of commands. Therefore, again to correct bad practice, Paul writes, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness." He himself, "permit[s] no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent." The Greek word St. Paul uses here is instructive as to his real concern, because we have already seen that women who are obedient to the headship of their husbands (or one presumes, to community headship) that is, veiled women, may prophesy speaking to the community. The key word that opens up his anxiety over what has happened in other churches is, as we might suspect, the word translated "to have authority over." The Greek verb "authentio" means literally, "to exercise power of one's self." It is not hard to see, then, in light of all the preceding how dangerous to the faith community is this woman who is her own authority. Heeding no one, self-satisfied with her spiritual experiences and insights, she is a Trojan Horse for the disobedient spirit to enter the community, and must not be allowed to teach. She must be silent. If only such women could be silenced today, what confusion would be kept out of the Church! (The Phillips translation paraphrases this whole sentence simply as "I believe their role to be receptive.")

As St. Paul goes on to remind us, it was just such that caused the fall of mankind. For the woman believed the deceiver - she was deceived into believing she was doing the right thing. Because of her intuitive gifts (certainly

as important to human life as logic), woman's logic often follows, and very seldom precedes her conclusions. The man sinned, but he sinned knowing what it was he was doing - he was sinning! He did not believe that he was doing the right thing. And as the head he must take the whole responsibility upon himself. It is Adam's sin that has brought the whole world into sin.

Woman's salvation Now St. Paul proceeds to tell the woman how she may be saved. This is certain to raise hackles unless the meaning is plumbed more deeply than the surface indicates. "Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness with modesty." No one is troubled over the last clause - in Christ everyone is saved if they continue in faith and love and holiness. However, how about that first command? Can only fruitful married women be saved? Of course, this is entirely counter to St. Paul's other teachings on woman. In I Corinthians 7 he encourages virgins to maintain their virginity for the Lord. (Was his inspiration for this the celibate relationship of Mary and Joseph just forty or so years before?) This then cannot be the intent of these words. Even stating this, there is a certain truth in the bare words as they are. Women are indeed created to be fruitful - their overall destiny is to be mother. The bedrock of fruitfulness is in bearing biological children. There must be no block to the fulfillment of God's intent for biological children, and it is an important part of a woman's meaning. Any mother will tell you that her twenty-four hour days of self sacrifice feel like "the narrow way that leads to life."

Bearing the child. But the full meaning will escape us if we restrict St. Paul's words to this biological meaning. In certain ancient variations of the translation of these words we find, "by the birth of the child," or even "through the Birth of the Child." And this alone plumbs the meaning of the phrase. This alone epitomizes the woman's place in the divine plan which The Blessed Virgin Mary fulfilled by her faith-life, and which produced the fruit, Jesus. All women are called to this yieldedness to the Spirit and this fruitfulness, to bring into the material, nitty-gritty world, the tangible material reality of those otherwise intangibles; love, joy, peace, patience, longsuffering - in other words . . . the Christ- child. By faith, believing in God's word, Mary brought forth the eternal Son from intangible spirit into tangible flesh. The secret? Believing God's word. Exulted Elizabeth in her presence, "Blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."(24) This is the opposite of Eve who did not believe God, but believed Satan and thus, "was deceived, and who fell into transgression."

Does St. Paul miss the mark, "Yet, women will be saved through bearing the child. . . No, woman is the sign. She, reflection of the Divine Woman, points the way. He is consistent.

Catherine deHueck Doherty writes in *Poustinia* "Your womb [man and woman] is a poustinia for the child, and you carry him wherever you go. Wherever you go you are pregnant with Christ, and you bring his presence. . . (25) You have contributed your fiat. He has asked you and chosen you to be the carrier of that silent poustinia within yourself. (26).

Ordained deaconesses? Does he in this letter address deaconesses who have received the same ordination as deacons when he addresses "the women" in the midst of a paragraph on the diaconate?(27) Considering the whole context it is very doubtful. Certainly St. Paul more than anyone recognized the polar meaning of male and female in the community, and would not have encouraged any muddlement of roles so blatant as this. To place the whole

picture in right perspective, we must realize something that we Christians have yet to comprehend - ordination establishes a headship role; a headship role is not prestigious; it is abject service. If we could grasp that truth, which Jesus came to demonstrate as true of the authority of Godhead, we would realize that ordained men serve women (as well as other men) and that those who receive their service are the honored ones - if one must put honor into the equation. The servant quality of headship is the indelible mark of the Redeemed order.

Widows in the Church In the 6th chapter of this pastoral letter to Timothy, instructions are given concerning widows in the church. How shall they be cared for? Already a special order has been established for them. They are formally enrolled, and take vows - a pledge to Christ for celibacy it seems. And then they act as a pool of dedicated, prayerful women who minister to the needs of the Church. Paul is mindful that this is a difficult thing to expect of a young widow. They are apt not to be able to keep their vow, and without the whole life experience of self-sacrifice of the older widows, they become idlers - which only leads to trouble. No, he wants them to remarry, bear children and rule their households.

“Oikodespoteo”! What an important word in this statement is often overlooked! “Rule” their households. The Greek word is even more instructive, “oikodespoteo,” which has two root words and means to be a house despot, or master of the house. In all the emphasis of roles, little attention is paid to this outright dominion plainly given to the woman to make her home her realm. Here she exercises her authority rightly, even though it is a delegated authority - that is under the overall headship of her husband. Still, her freedom to act in this realm is almost total. As long as she is faithful to the overarching limits established by their mutual life together, she has a free hand to manage all the manifold aspects of a household including household finances. Her husband must curtail his authority in regard to the actual running of the house, because it literally is not his business. If he intrudes and is obtrusively interfering he stands to be corrected. This is an important addition to the teaching about the submission of wives to their husbands. St. Paul closes the section stressing again the importance of women being in right order in the community . “I would have younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us. For some have already strayed after Satan.” The enemy of the community, especially of woman, is the rebel, Satan. When God's order in this basic unit is well observed, no occasion is given for the revilement of the faith by the enemy.

Titus 2:3 “kalodidaskolos.” The letter to Titus, written in about the same time, has many of the same concerns. Yet another important concept is added to the role of woman. This time the instruction is given about the work of the older woman. This person, often a widow, is described as a woman who has followed in the footsteps of the Woman who also became a widow bereft even of her only son. She is one who “must be well attested by her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.” Added to that St. Paul writes to Titus that such women are to be “kalodidaskolos” the only time the word is used in the Bible. That is, they are to be “teachers of what is good.” And of what does their teaching consist? They are to train the young women to love their husbands and their children according to all the precepts St. Paul has so carefully laid down in his marriage instructions. They are to teach what it means in the Christ-centered life to be “sensible, chaste, domestic, kind and submissive to their husbands.” It must be taught, and is taught best by women. So very much family happiness depends upon each

word, and so much has been lost in the upbringing of Christian young women of our century. Blessed Edith Stein's perception of the problems were crystal clear, and she proposed an educational system for girls to bring exactly these: sensible balance which includes preparation for professional life, chastity, domesticity, kindness and true submission. Her plan, however, still waits for implementation.

Submission, the heart of the Gospel .With any emphasis on submission, especially of women, we run the danger of misunderstanding. St. Paul knew that; it frustrated him. Blessed Edith asked him some questions, yet she understood well the heart of the Gospel and the attitude of its founder, Jesus. Despite his demonstration, in both living the holy life and in facing death, the meaning of "take up your cross and follow me" or "submission" is still hated and feared by Christians. Not, however, for Edith Stein whose course of following Jesus ended in an Auschwitz gas chamber. As for her doubts, it is certain that St. Paul's convictions were consistently rooted in Christ and were not misogynistic or blind Jewish legalism; he and Blessed Edith really saw eye to eye. Looking to Our Blessed Virgin Mother with love, both of them would see the apostolic words coming alive in the flesh of the Eternal Feminine. Any woman at first put off by his strong teaching of woman's role can form an exposition for herself by asking the intercession of Mary and prayerfully immersing herself in meditations on her relationship to the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

Footnotes:

1. Stein, Edith, Woman:, The Second Volume of her Collected Works published by Institute of Carmelite Studies 1987 p.64
2. Ibid p.67
3. Ibid p.63
4. John Paul II "Dominum et Vivificantem" 1,2,10
5. Genesis 1:26,27
6. Isaiah 54:5
7. I Cor. 7:3-4
8. ICor.11:11-12
9. Genesis 3:15
10. op. cit p. 63
11. Matt 1:1
12. II Cor. 11:2-3
13. Gen 3:6
14. op. cit. p. 62
15. I Cor. 14:37
16. I Cor 17:37-38
17. Eph 2:14-18
18. Matt 19:6
19. John 17:22

20. Eph. 4:3

21. Colossians 3:18

22.1 John 2:16

23. IPeter3:4

24. Luke 1:45

25. Doherty, Catherine deHueck, Poustinia Ave Maria, 1975, p. 89

26. Ibid, p.90

27. I Tim. 3:8-13

28. I Tim. 5:10

13 THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF SUBMISSION

A reply to an article in The Catholic Bulletin

St. Paul who entreated women to be submissive to their husbands, did so, not detrimentally affected by his cultural times, but with the same clear Christian vision of “submission” that he had when he described his Lord and Master, Jesus - “And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” Just reread his powerful poem of I Corinthians 13 which defines love as submission.

The revulsion of our own cultural milieu to the concept of submission judges our culture as one disallowing the Holy Spirit whose work is to take the mind “set on the flesh” and hostile to God, and bring it into submission to God - a quote from Romans. If we elevate our cultural times as superior in understanding to what the Church has declared is the Word of God, we have shut ourselves off from salvation, because the motivations of self-empowerment, narcissism, and egalitarianism of our age are counter to the Gospel.

Submission is a composite of two Latin words - mission, meaning a task to which one is sent, and sub, meaning under. If in Christian submission like that modeled by Jesus, one is sent, it implies a sender. In his case the sender, God the Father,” who sent his son into the world, not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved”- his mission. The Sender fully equipped him who was sent for his mission, and continues to equip with strength, understanding, faith, and supernatural prayer those whom he calls to a like submission.

And Jesus as St. Paul understood, was sent “under.” Mother Teresa is a model of one who is “sent under” today, and so are multitudes of godly women who live out this calling - the scriptures understand from Eve to Mary that woman is the key to the whole people becoming submissive to God’s will. The Church is struggling to incorporate that understanding now.

Jesus, who in the Holy Trinity is the Second Person, came to renew our minds to a submission to God like his own. Woman modeled that divine relationship in her submission to her husband - an equal but opposite role with no hint of subservience in it. Just as the Trinity has order, the Father who sends, the Son who is sent, and the Holy Spirit who unites these polar Persons in love, so God has fashioned his creatures man and woman to exemplify and benefit by the same ordering. The family by this order is meant to experience the peace and loving relationships of the Persons of the Trinity - a very practical outcome of what might seem only theoretical otherwise.

To believe that submission of the Son to the Father is a picture of dominance and subjection is to display ignorance of the Christian meaning of words and to fall into a heresy long settled - the Arian. To believe that in a

Christian family the woman's submission freely given to her husband in modeling the Second Person of the Trinity is a "stoicism" leftover from a bygone culture is to promote the same ignorance and confusion of Christian things. For further reading, a thoroughly balanced view of woman's meaning in Salvation History which is lived out in the home and the Christian community, read WOMAN by BI. Edith Stein who was martyred by the Nazis at Auschwitz. Hers is a truly prophetic voice, at once cognizant of the suffering this fallen world has imposed on woman and her ultimate meaning in God's plan.

14 THE SECOND LETTER OF ST. JOHN - WRITTEN TO WHOM?

There must be discoveries yet to be made in the Scriptures. While deconstructionists are dissecting the Scriptures often, it seems, with the result of undermining faith, it occurred to me it would be great fun and perhaps even instructive, to become an ad-constructionist and find in the mysterious Second Letter of John a hidden reality that would thrill those of us who love the Scriptures, The Catholic Church, and the Blessed Mother. Could it be shown without straining credulity that this little letter tucked into the scriptures almost as an afterthought was actual correspondence between the Apostle John and the Blessed Virgin Mary?

Why not an ordinary reader of scripture instead of applying critical faculties to reduce, apply those faculties to attempt to build faith, even to showing scripturally Mary's place as Lady next to her Lord!

We know to begin with that neither the Scriptures nor Our Blessed Mother need our feeble help to build faith, they stand securely on their own and witness to Truth through the Holy Spirit without any ad-constructionists. But still the idea appeals; let's see what can be done.

The commentaries generally submit that the Second Letter of John is written to a church in the early Christian world. About the writer there are several theories. A few say perhaps he was St. John, the apostle behind the Gospel, others that he was an elder who followed the school of St. John, and still others fall back into complete agnosticism on the matter - an unidentifiable early Christian who had some influence in the church. Whoever it is, for most, he is no longer thought to be the writer of the Gospel and certainly not the writer of Revelation. Problem? He refers to himself as "the Elder" in both the second and third letter, but not in either of the others.

An early writer, Papias, speaks of two Johns, one the Apostle, the other the Elder. He is confused about other things; if John referred to himself as "The Elder," he may well be confused about this, too. Critics also dissociate the writer of the Gospel (who was not St. John either, they say) and the writer of Revelation because of "style."

Why an apostle who has written the most profound of the gospels cannot be the same man who under prophetic inspiration, in the manner of the apocalyptic writers of the Old Testament, writes an epic, eschatological, multi-leveled drama, is a question. Much of the language in Gospel, Letters, and Apocalypse is so similar that it strains credulity to accept the lengthy explanations of why not. The apostle visionary who counts himself to be among the elders who surround the throne he describes in Revelation, twenty-four elders, representing the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles, would do well to address himself as "the Elder."

As the Elder he recognizes himself to have uncommon authority, original apostolic authority, and writes accordingly. While this amazing resource of original apostolic authority was running thin, a new generation of apostolically appointed bishops already taking over, the apostle writes at varying times to encourage, strengthen, exhort, and warn, first of all the “beloved little child” who was the general Christian (I John), then a prominent Christian woman (II John), and lastly, a Christian man (III John), as well as the whole Christian Church (Revelation also called The Apocalypse). Who else at the end of the first century could call himself “Elder” and “John” without explanation and have such assurance of his place and his clout? How many John’s were there with apostolic authority, and how many Elders who wrote just like the John of the Gospel?

Sometimes we think our own century to be unusual in its challenges to faith. But by the end of the first century things were getting hairy in the Church. False teachers abounded. St. Paul had a battle on his hands with antinomianism, later with the beginnings of Gnosticism which were after his lifetime to give such grief to the Church of Second and Third Centuries. St. Peter, too, wrote with heavy warnings about false doctrines. St. Jude’s attention had been alerted; he devoted a letter to his acute concerns for true faith when, by his own admission, he would rather have written about something else.

St. John, the apostle of Love, is forced into the fray against this wildfire heresy. His reputation as a battler of heretics is a strong part of the traditions that have come down to us.

Gnosticism, a “Knowledge,” was gaining its revisionist feet. It claimed that Jesus could not have been incarnated into a human body. That was a repulsive idea to those ‘in the know.’ Esoteric knowledge (gnosis) said that the flesh and the material world were rotten to the core, made by a lesser god to entrap the human spirit. The only good, the only godliness, was the pure spirit. Therefore, to receive the Holy Spirit lifted one out of the entrapment of evil materiality, and promised that if one climbed the angelic ladder, from spiritual rung to spiritual rung, eventually ties of nasty earthiness would be broken.

With such a perspective, it is obvious that Jesus, the Son of God, could never have been a man, not really. He must have been a spirit who merely looked like a man. The body on the cross was probably that of the fellow conscripted to carry it, Simon of Cyrene, and the spiritual Jesus just walked away to reappear on the morning of the first day of the week.

This heresy had a compelling reason to believe in it - believing in it meant you didn’t have to follow moral precepts. Morality no longer mattered. Do with the old body anything you liked, after all, it is only part of the bondage to a bad god. To live above the body in the Spirit meant that you were free to unite it with a prostitute, or any other such thing.

St. Paul had a fit about this falsity. To combat the heresy he changed his usual use of words in writing to the Colossians. No longer would he use the word gnosis which had taken on so many dark associations, he would use epi-gnosis, meaning *full* knowledge, the knowledge of Jesus Christ and far above the mere *gnosis* of Gnosticism. St. John would do the same in his first letter. Instead of talking about knowledge in the same way, he would carefully distinguish when he used it and bring a new term into play, *oida* - meaning “heart knowledge.” Who always stands in the way of the free run of apostasy and error that is continually sprouting and growing in the Christian world? One person must forever be gotten around - Mary, the mother of Jesus.

With the burgeoning Gnostic heresy of the late first century, who stood four square in the way? Mary, Jesus' mother. Who knew the reality of the flesh of Jesus more than she? She knows from the very beginning that this child is the offspring of the Holy Spirit, is God incarnate, but is also of her own flesh and womb. As long as she lives she refutes the error of the Gnostics and Docetists that Jesus only appeared to be man, but was in reality only a spirit. *In* her the word became flesh. She is the living testimony to the great saving act of God, the act of love which overcomes the world, the flesh, and the devil, and saves us from our sins.

In the first letter of John, the apostle makes the case for the Godhead and the humanity of Jesus. It is a strong argument against those who do not accept the Incarnation. He understands the gravity of the situation very well. He has met it in his experience and he counters it with all the corrected *gnosis*, and *oïda* that he has at his disposal.

The second letter is the one that I want to highlight and make a strong though purely subjective appeal, that this letter may be a letter written, not from John to a church as current criticism would have it, but to a woman, a Christian woman, and a very specific Christian woman - Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

Mary was given to John at the cross by Jesus as his mother, and he to her as her son. As has been noted many times, this was not only for her physical protection and provision, but for the spiritual significance of her motherhood over all Christians as well. Tradition says that she and John at some time later moved to Ephesus where he assumed the responsibilities of the bishopric. To this day, because of archeological evidence, the hill where her house stood is pointed out in the ruins of Ephesus.

The second letter begins by identifying the writer as “the elder” “The elder” presbyteros, or priest (or Bishop, as John was the Bishop of Ephesus during the last years of the first century and the first of the second), is John the apostle. In 70 A.D, the earliest date the historical-critical exegesis generally allow, John would be around 61 years old. In 70 AD, Mary would have been around eighty-eight years old. It is possible to add another ten years placing the writing of these letters in 80A.D., and with a very long life span for both Mary and John (we know John was around), still find them living. He lived into the second century tradition says, possibly to the age of 110! when he was still being carried through the streets blessing “the little children” and telling them to “love one another.” Beautiful!

However, such late dating for these books is again being debated. Claude Tresmontant, a Sorbonne scholar, and Anglican Bishop John Robinson, among others, have cogent arguments against the late dating of Johannine material. Such reassessed dating would place the epistles between 40 and 60, securing a more reasonable age for Mary - in her early sixties, just before her death.

The language of the three epistles is completely Johannine; verse after verse is analogous to the gospel of John. The Gospel of John, itself, has Mary as its hidden inspiration and, in a sense, author. Let us look closely, then at the Second Letter: *The Elder to the Elect Lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ the Fathers Son, in truth and love.*

He opens, ‘to the elect lady.’ Has not the Church given to Mary the title, “Lady chosen of God?” This is exactly the meaning of elect lady. Lady, *Kuria*, in Greek, is the feminine of Lord, *Kurios*. With use of other suffixes it always

denotes an exercise of Lordship. In the feminine this is a lady of high position. It is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used, and it is used twice here. *Electos* obviously means *chosen*.

John loves this lady and her children. Who are her children? John makes that clear in another of his writings (yes, remember I subscribe that the book of Revelation is also authored by John). In Revelation 12:17 John says that the woman's offspring (and the woman is an image with at least three levels of interpretation; Mary first, then the Church, and Everywoman) are those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. At the beginning of that book St. John identifies himself as one of her children as well - "*his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ.*"

He loves the lady and her children in the truth. He knows that all who know the truth love this lady and her children as well. The truth which the Holy Spirit guides all into, as he wrote in his gospel, he believes will guide them to love the lady and her children -The Blessed Mother and all those who accept her spiritual motherhood. It is a very special family.

His greeting honors her especially in that he sends grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ, whom, he points out to further laud her, is indeed, "the Father's Son in truth and love." Mary, he acknowledges by this, is the mother of the Father's Son.

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children following the truth, just as have been commanded by the Father. . .

On his travels, John rejoices to find her children (those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus, accepting her overall motherhood) following the truth. The RSV has "some" of her children. Upon examination this is an odd translation of word which can mean *of*, and has many other meanings. It seems a possible translation might be, "to find truth walking among your children." Peripateo nowhere in the King James is translated "following," the root means "to tread", and the prefix, "pen" means "about." It is translated "to walk" ninety-two times in the King James. St. John is delighted to find truth walking among Mary's children. Her children are to be those specially endowed with truth as the centuries go by as members of the Catholic Church.

"And now I beg you, Lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we follow his commandments, this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love."

Surely, no one had had the commandment more "from the beginning" than Mary. Was there a chance that someone was trying to wedge between the Lady and John with some false doctrine, destroying their love for each other? "Let's remember, Mary," says St. John, "That we have followed his commandment from the beginning, that we have had this love from the first." It is a favorite theme of John's from the Gospel on

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the anti-christ. Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward.

It is interesting, in an aside, to note that the phrase "A full reward be given you by the Lord," is also written of Ruth, the distinct foreshadower of Mary, whose life so parallels hers - did John think so, too, and deliberately link the two?

Mary would hardly need to be warned about gnostic errors, she who bore Him in her own body. But at sixty plus years, of a generous and trusting nature, she might have been ignorant of the sweep of this heresy. John goes on to warn her about the deceivers that had gone out into the world. She needed to be careful of people who might try to find a foothold for their heresy by discrediting her as mother of Jesus. She could not be gullible. She should look out!

The translation of *heautou* may not be “yourselves” but “ourselves” And the third person plural could be used through the whole section instead of the second person. “Look to ourselves!” or “We better look out! - that we may not lose what we have worked for, but may have a full reward.” On the other hand, it might be translated, “Look at yourself, “or “Behold, yourself! You cannot lose what you accomplished, but will win a full reward.” After all, what a blow to Mary, to realize that there are those abroad, who might even come to her door, who would try to trick her into some admission, some words that could be twisted, that could be used against the fact of her birthing Jesus in the flesh. Of course, who she was could not change, the facts could not change, but Mary could be devastated by such a lie, her life and meaning totally discredited by the enemies of the Incarnation.

Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

If such a person, with such a false doctrine, should come to the door of their joint home in Ephesus, Mary should not stand on hospitality, a hospitality that she was known for. She should not receive him into the house, or even give him a greeting. Any support such people receive makes the one who helps him a sharer in a wicked work. Mary must lay aside her compassionate approach to all who came to her door. It will be hard for her not to take in the stranger, especially one who claims to be a Christian; but in this case Satan was trying to undo her as “The Lady” for all future generations.

In the third letter, John writes to an individual, Gaius, commending him on his godly actions, and also warning him against a self-styled leader who is not obedient to St. John’s apostolic direction. He uses a brief close, “*I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face.*”

The scripture scholars strike me as obtuse when they take this personal ending, so appropriate for closing a letter to an individual and turn around and feel the same ending is suitable for the ending of a letter to “a church.” Clearly the second letter is not written to a church, but to an individual just as is the third letter.

John ends his letter to Mary as he does in Gaius letter, “*Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face,*” to that he adds just to Mary, “*That our joy may be complete.*” A favorite phrase of his in the Gospel (which she inspired, I believe) that is especially apt in this setting.

The children of your elect sister greet you.

This is the translation of the last phrase of the letter. It is an odd ending even if this were directed to a church; “elect sister,” who might that be? The scholars believe it is another church. I suggest this ending needs only a couple of commas, “The children of thine own, elect sister, greet you,” or “The children of yours, Sister, Chosen of God, greet

you.” The “Chosen sister,” Mary, was not only John’s “mother” by Jesus’ own command, but as a fellow Christian she was also his “sister.” The end greeting would then include John and all those, you and me and thousands over the centuries, who are her children and who *love the truth*.

15 A REVIEW OF EDITH STEIN'S WOMAN
THE COLLECTED WORKS OF EDITH STEIN VOL.2 WOMAN

Translated by Freda Mary Oben, PhD

Edited by Dr L Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, OCD

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Elijah complained to God that he was the only one left who believed. St. Athanasius cried, "The whole world has gone Arian!" And some of us women who believe in the Scriptural meaning of woman are tempted to think of ourselves as solitaries. What a joy it is to open the pages of a book and find a kindred spirit, "a bosom friend" in the words of Anne of Green Gables , but what an erudite, and holy kindred spirit!

Edith Stein has been much in the news since Pope John Paul II's spring of '87 visit to Germany when he beatified this Carmelite nun in the Colognes soccer stadium. His decision to beatify a woman Jewish by birth, Catholic by conversion, and killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in 1942 ignited a controversy. Some Jewish leaders believe that her death is related only to her Jewishness, not to Christian martyrdom, and considered that assertion an insult.

Finding the documents which make up the book in the abandoned ruins of Carmel in Herkenbosch, Holland, would make a fascinating story in itself. Among these loose sheets were the articles presented in the book which present a synthesis of the teachings of Edith Stein on woman, her view of the problem of woman, and also the feminine ideal to which Edith Stein herself aspired. An intelligent, perceptive, deep comprehension of the Scriptures and the Church are apparent on every page of this second volume of her collected works. She totally understands the meaning of woman in the face of a feminism which sounds as up-to-date as this morning's paper. Though written fifty years ago Edith Stein captures both the positives and negatives of the feminist struggle, seeing the gains made educationally, but also the possible detrimental effects on the spirit of woman, her psyche - mind, will and emotions. In no way a fundamentalist, Sr. Teresia (her Carmelite name) takes the Bible seriously. She begins at the beginning - the Book of Genesis, and elucidates the intent of God in creating man and woman, then traces through the Old Testament the effects of the Fall, finding both the ideal and the fallen realm in the writings of St. Paul and St. Peter when they deal with woman in the new founded Church.

With mental precision the subordinate role of woman to man is accepted while rejecting any idea that this role denies equality. Woman and man have "a call." "A call is sent from someone to someone, for something in a

distinct manner." Man and woman's call is indelibly writ in their nature which is distinct, "he created them male and female." In perfection her call is to be companion and helpmate to the man, like the left hand is to the right; the Fall alone caused subjugation - a result of the changed relationship to God.

To right the distorted relations between man and woman the first necessity is to right that relationship to God; "salvation admits of no differences between the sexes; rather, the salvation of each one and their relationship to one another both depend on the same close personal union with Christ." Only with a secure spiritual base can woman regain her rightful equality to man, only with acceptance of her original call to subordination to man can she find her happiness and meaning. The meaning of woman is central to the gospel. She is "the gateway through which God found entrance to humankind," and all her energies and qualities continue to be perfected according to the ways of spiritual fruitfulness which may or may not include a life of dedicated virginity. In the redeemed community the man assumes leadership as proper to him. It is essential that the body not rebel against the head or the whole organism will suffer "as much as if the head allowed the body to atrophy." The man's role is to aid the development of the talents and energies of his wife and children and strengthen the spirituality of his wife by encouraging her to participate in his own creative work, or in independent activity of her own.

A good part of the book is devoted to the principles and problems of women's education which Stein develops systematically according to her understanding of the meaning of woman and her fulfillment. The emphasis is on subjects which anchor and round out her emotional response to life, allowing that dimension of her nature its importance, while balancing it with a well disciplined mind. It is difficult in the space of review to do justice to Stein's progressive ideas on the subject.

Yet, with the modern emphasis on genetics as the major detriment in human personality, one is left wondering if she places too much trust in education (even Christian education) to form a soul of woman that is expansive, quiet, clear, self-contained, empty of itself, and mistress of itself and its body, so that "the entire person is readily at the disposal of every call." It seems more a work of unaided miraculous grace.

When you really enjoy a book you sometimes wish it were possible to dialogue with the writer, especially when writer is a near saint. I would like to talk with St. Teresa further about St. Paul's concerns about women in the church. Could it be that he is concerned about a second Fall among the redeemed (II Cor: 1 1) because woman again denies her equal but subordinate role, rather, than as she sees it, a reflection of the Old Testament's fallen value system still active in Paul in regard to women?

WOMAN is full of wisdom as well as thought-provoking ideas for feminist and non feminist alike.

16 THE WOMAN AND THE END TIME

Sometimes it is profitable to lay out what we know of Salvation History from beginning to end. This is particularly true when in these confusing times we want to gain a perspective of the meaning and place of woman in God's plan. Granted, what we know of God's plan is always dimly perceived, yet we believe that God has revealed certain essentials to guide us on our way, and those essentials are delineated in the Bible and through the Sacred Tradition of the Church.

In Genesis, we find the engrossing story of our wonderful beginnings as God's people and also what went wrong. In three short chapters with deeply symbolic words we learn that the original man and woman meant to be the progenitors of a perfect people, failed to meet the necessary test of pure-hearted obedience to, and love for God. We see how they were sorely tried by a Tempter and how their heads were turned by his persuasions that there was a better way than obeying God and thinking His thoughts after Him. That better way was to decide for themselves what was best for them - after all, said the Tempter, that was the way God Himself lived - He heeded no one's will other than his own.

This line of reasoning was "of greater significance for the woman," says Blessed Edith Stein. We can immediately see that in perfection, woman's stance to the man was the picture of what the whole of mankind was to be to God - that of loving obedience. So the Tempter had to succeed with her first if he was to intrude his values into this perfect world he enviously desired to rule and to ruin.

The story quickly comes to its pitiful end. The couple are thrust from a Paradise in which there is no decay, no aging, no sin or death, out into what they have chosen for themselves - a world containing all of these "choices."

Salvation History, God's loving alternative plan, is then set in motion. For though they have cut God out of their lives by their own choice, and the Holy Spirit who unified the original "community of love" had had to greatly curtail his work, leaving them in discord, yet as the Eucharistic prayer tells us, "even when he (mankind) disobeyed you and lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the power of death, but helped all men to seek and find you."

A final judgment on the Tempter establishes hope in the man and woman's hearts. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gn.3:15 RSV)

This ray of light shines like an almost unseen point at the end of a very long and dark tunnel. Woman through the Old Testament infuses her life with that pinpoint of hope, that she may bear the one to crush the enemy. Each of the women of faith of the Old Testament begs God for fruitfulness. The first three, even four, of the mothers of Israel were blocked from conception, and they all were given fertility by the intervention of God through prayer, except the fourth who displayed a shocking resourcefulness to those of us who live by the Ten Commandments. Tamar, who lived before the lawgiver Moses, took things into her own hands and seduced her own father-in-law. Bearing children of the Promise was that important!

These opening chapters of Salvation History point out an essential principle in God's plan - men may be given the promises, the covenants and the prophecies, but it is within the woman that the miracle happens that makes these external words come to pass. That the first three patriarchs were married to barren women, and the son of the Covenant in each case was conceived through the intervention of God through a union of three, no merely the union of two, will also have bearing on the rest of the great story. It is woman's seed that is important to God. Strange enough! The Bible is daily attacked for being thoroughly and exclusively a man's book. But look at the patriarchs! They practiced polygamy and had intercourse with other women, yet God had one woman in mind as the mother of his people. That woman through each of the first three generations was sterile. That barrenness was like a flag flying to point her out - it was this woman whose seed was most important to God's plan. Abraham's seed impregnated Hagar, and Keturah, among others, but only Sarah's son was the Covenant bearer. Jacob had at least Leah and two concubines besides Rachel for consorts, yet it was barren Rachel's child, Joseph, who was the redeemer of his brothers.

At each juncture point along the progressive way to the birth of the Redeemer, a woman stands weeping and praying to be the woman who will bring forth from her womb the salvation of Israel. Israel, the nation chosen by God to be his own, becomes another figure of that woman. God tell His People through the prophets that He is their husband. It is through Almighty God not the Baals, that fruitfulness comes to Israel. They must be like a faithful wife to him and not practice idolatry which is, after all, adultery. The very Hebrew word used to express "knowing" God is a sexual one: "Yada" means "sexual intercourse." This is how closely the Israelite established the fruitfulness of male, female relationship with "knowing" their God.

Woman is therefore embedded in the Scripture like a gleaming precious stone. It is possible to perceive that all the rest of the Old Testament story is just the setting to that gem. Arising as the gateway to the New Testament fulfillment of all the prophecies and promises is a woman - Mary.

Jesus calls her twice, "woman." He, in this forceful word, points out to us the culmination of two thousand years of preparation for the Redeemer through the faithful women of Israel. She is the woman whom Satan was warned would best him. She would bring forth from her seed, impregnated by no man, but the Holy spirit alone, the Saviour who would crush Satan's head.

Blessed Mary stands there at that crux of time - the fullness of time. The tiny point of light has become like the light of the sun. She shall see what all her sisters longed to see, and whose longing made it possible. She pays loving recognition to them all in her songs of joy over the Child who is to be born.

Death, the Tempter, has not been idle through the centuries. He has been, as God foretold in the garden, the nemesis of woman each step of the way. She speaks by her very bodily form of fruitfulness, and of how that fruitfulness is achieved - of the willing giving of herself totally to another. This is the truth that scalds him who stands for death, for total self-absorption, for self-will. He loathes the woman. It is he who elevates barrenness and who impedes conception. At the birth of the Child it is Herod who is Death's agent to destroy the baby boys of Bethlehem. The Book of Revelation tells us that had God not protected Mary, she would have been swept away in the wrath of the Dragon.

Saint Louis de Montfort writes: "God has established only one enmity - but it is an irreconcilable one - which will last and even go on increasing to the end of time. That enmity is between Mary, his worthy Mother, and the devil; between the children and servants of the Blessed Virgin and the children and followers of Lucifer."

In the words of Jesus more is revealed about the woman. First, her role - that is, the one who heeds, who serves, who obeys, is elevated as first in the Kingdom that God is establishing through His Son. He explains Himself as being in just that relationship to the Father. But beyond this, he has words to say directly to women that carries their task into the future.

Alas, however, His words indicate that women at the end time will not heed, serve or obey. Rather they will scorn the attitudes of the feminine and all that goes with it. From His words on the Via Dolorosa to the women of Jerusalem we understand that, at the end, the enemy of woman's soul may seem to have won. The Adversary seems to be winning the day. The fruit of the womb of Mary will soon be crushed in death. But Jesus says, this is still a time of green wood, the time is coming when the wood will be dry. Beware of the fire of rebellion when it reaches that stage! Then women will succumb entirely to that original temptation in the Garden. They will scorn conception, and abort their own children. Death, the adversary, will take control! Now this prediction is enough to cause us all to despair, for we recognize our own time. Yet, Jesus would not, could not, leave us in such a place. We must go on to the cross and stand with Mary to hear His last words about woman. For it, we go to the Gospel of John (19:26) When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

The words which immediately follow these are of utmost importance, especially in the Greek which has been slightly, but importantly changed in English. The original may well bear out the eschatological import of this last act of Jesus - giving the disciple to Mary as son, and Mary to the disciple as Mother. The literal Greek is:

After this knowing Jesus that now all things have been finished,
that might be fulfilled the scripture, says; I thirst.

In giving the woman to all mankind (here the beloved disciple John is the stand-in for us all) as mother, Jesus has overcome the Tempter, the adversary, Death, in one blow, by, with, and in the woman.

"Taking her into his own home" is no light phrase in the Gospel of John. With this deep man of God, every phrase is loaded with higher meaning. This phrase can mean no less than that the Christian disciple of all times is not complete, all things are not tied up in Christ - finished, and scripture is not fulfilled until Mary, the woman, with

all her totally feminine qualities - humility, heeding, service, obedience, is taken into the very heart and soul of that believer whether he be man or woman! Then the woman has fulfilled all scripture.

A great cleavage has appeared across the face of Christendom as it resides in the Holy Catholic Church. That cleavage, as great or greater than any previous disunity in Church history, centers in a controversy over woman. The adversary's agenda is patently propagandized even within the Church against the "traditional" way of woman. The Blessed Mother is twisted by words into a being she would not recognize. Sterility is elevated, fruitfulness is shunned by those who claim to be citizens of the Christendom. One could make a forecast that the goats - those of independent minds and wills - are being separated by the woman issue from the sheep, those who obediently follow the Shepherd.

On one side of the abyss are those who actually seem to accede to the adversary's old temptation - it is far better to decide for one's self about good and evil than to obey God and follow His will - it is more "fulfilling." But on the other side, forced into choosing because of the dramatic separation of the sides, are those who are becoming more "Marian."

The increased appearances of the Blessed Mother in the past hundred or so years has dramatized penance for sin, prayer and fasting. And now, more and more believe that for many years she has appeared everyday to children, now adults, in a village in Yugoslavia to underline these same antidotes for what ails the world. If this is, indeed The Woman, will she not have something to say about woman's essential work in Salvation History?

These words have come from Medjugorje from a talk given September 25, 1986, by Fr. Slako, the pastor of St. James, where the apparitions of Mary are still taking place:

(Mary) shows herself as a mother here. Since Our Lady started giving our Thursday messages they all started with 'dear children.' This is the way a mother speaks. I think in this word "children," in presenting herself as mother, is the whole secret of Medjugorje . . . We find peace, we can't say because of the prayer in the Church, but because pilgrims are meeting the mother. And she is doing this in a very hidden way. She behaves like she behaved in the gospel

I remember a poet who was here once. . . and. he wrote a poem. "In the eyes of the visionaries I saw the eyes of the mother. And the expression in their faces I saw, I felt the meeting of the mother." ... So now, if she presents herself as a mother what should we learn from this? First we are allowed to enjoy her presence, „we love to be touched by her presence. This is not the aim of her coming. She comes as mother and she wants to protect us, and she wants to educate us. . . so that we can start to have a new task in this world. . . And you see that we should all learn that we are all mothers. Not only those who have children but all of us. Because being a mother means protecting and being a mother means taking care of life.

. . . Take-for example abortions. Where is the mother here? What is the mother doing? She is destroying . By taking care of the life in our families, in the Church, in the world. I think we can understand what it means that we are all mothers . . . For this dimension of being mother, we must pray.

St. Paul who has been castigated by modern critics as a man who hates women, and who reverts to he pre-Christian Jewish culture to re-enslave the woman (how out of whack that is laid next to the real chronicle of woman in the Old Testament), had an authoritative word in more than a few of his letters to those who would demean

woman by enticing her to accept again the adversary's old temptation to leave the obedient side and claim her own authority. These words of St. Paul are consistently misunderstood, and we have no space to go into them here, but one section we must address. This is in First Timothy. After explaining why women must learn in submissiveness (another concept that needs careful explanation), Paul asserts:

Yet, woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

It is an interesting footnote in the Revised Standard Version that this may be translated: 'the birth of the child,' referring to Jesus Christ (the amplified translation gives "by birth of the Divine Child"). This then brings us back to the Marian soul, especially in the woman, which is saved by bearing the Divine child. We are all to be such mothers comes through the Medjugorje messages.

So appropriate to the thesis presented here, St. Louis de Montfort prophesied that the last Age before the Second Coming of Jesus to establish his Kingdom, would be a Marian Age. It may not be the best form to close an article with four questions, but these may stimulate further thought because space has run out.

Can the rise of militant feminism that denies the establishing meaning of woman, replacing it with the ideal of barrenness and selfishness, be the sign that such a Marian Age is upon us? Wouldn't the tactic of the enemy be just such an upheaval in an attempt like that of Herod in Bethlehem to stop the Holy Spirit's advance? Wouldn't the Holy Spirit use that same upheaval to bring the Church to deeper clarifications about woman than it had ever experienced before? Haven't we already seen the beginning of a huge rebirth of dedication to the Blessed Mother which goes beyond holy pictures, and devotions, even beyond rosaries, as wonderful as these externals are, but a magnificent rebirth that extends to countless men and women taking Mary into their hearts and souls to become like her - pleasing in everything to God, humble, peaceful and obedient - bearing Christ to the world 'till He comes again?

17 MESSAGES FROM THE WOMEN OF THE WAY OF THE CROSS

While the controversy swirls around the meaning and role of woman, four stations of the Way of the Cross send a clear message from holy women about woman. Two of these are Biblical accounts from the Passion and two are from the strong tradition of the Church.

The first is with Mary, His Mother, the fourth station. John and Mary are the only two of Jesus' friends and family to be with him at the end. They followed closely his tortured progress along the road from Pilate's seat at the Antonia fortress to Golgotha outside the city walls. Each lash of the whip had wounded her too, each mocking word had torn her, every point of thorn pierced her, and his every excruciating step was hers as well. Simon had prophesied at his Presentation that the sword would pierce her heart, not just her son's, he said, "so that the thoughts of many hearts would be laid bare." In the future, those who came to Jesus would eventually meet his mother; whether they turned toward or away from the suffering mother's embrace would reveal their innermost being.

So Mary her soul rent, but radiating a calm born of faith and trust, walked out from the obscurity of the crowd to greet and strengthen her Son for the last time. She must not be a burden to Him whose burden is already cosmic - upon Him is the sin of every fallen man and woman since the beginning of time to its end. She does not fall or faint. She, who with us, is redeemed by His blood, displays the fruits of her redemption. Seeing beyond the horror of this world's pride and violence, she believes God. The pressure of all history, past, present and future, bears down on one small point in time. The very breath is squeezed from her when Jesus, staggering under the cross, looks at her. She touches his hand; knowing. This is not futility! It is by God for God's creation. Jesus. Victor. But in the meantime - agony.

Tradition tells us about the woman of the sixth station who bravely steps from the safe anonymity of the callous mob to the side of her Lord. In this moment of his pain, what can she do for him who has given her everything? Her helplessness is only exceeded by her love. It is a love stronger than fear. Rough soldiers shove Jesus along, will they strike her down? No matter; pulling off her kerchief, she steps out to wipe the blood which, streaming from the thorns, cakes around his eyes and clouds His sight. Before she is impatiently knocked away, she looks into those eyes for the last time, and is sealed against the crowd's mockery by their depths of love. For this her name is recalled in the devotion of uncounted millions, "Veronica"; a woman, brave, devoted to the Lord, and compassionately self-giving. Those like her serve him with whatever small thing they have, and in return, carry his image imprinted on their souls.

At the eighth station - by the time Jesus reaches that knot of grieving Jerusalem matrons who beat their breasts begging heaven's reprieve, he has fallen twice. Swimming into his vision these tragic faces stop him. Words of the great prophet Hosea reel in his brain, for in this moment, clearly, they are coming true. Hosea was rejected by his wife who preferred a life of harlotry. Jesus' beloved, the Bride he was sent to love and wed, is now despising and rejecting him. These women are the sign of that very bride he came for - a people surrendering themselves to him the Bridegroom. In the manner of His own mother's surrender to the Holy Spirit, these women too are a sign that points to what love and obedience is all about. Woman's yielding to man brings forth fruit of the flesh, and true to the biological continuum which it completes, yielding to the Holy Spirit brings forth fruits of the Spirit. The words from Hosea mixed with Jesus' own contemplation spill from his panting mouth as He gives a last puzzling prophecy:

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us,’ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:27-31)

At this moment living out Hosea's prophecy of spurned love, Jesus projects it into the future. Rejecting God means barrenness and death for the rebellious. Hosea saw that clearly. Yes, the very Promise of Life and Fruitfulness, is being brought to his death by rebellion. Yet, the wood is green. What is coming when the wood is dry, these women will not believe. Jewish women valued their bodies as vessels of God to bring new life into his world; they longed to be fruitful for Yahweh, to be the mothers of His prophets, priests, and kings.

These women will be incredulous at what Jesus foresees. In the end time, rebellion will have reached incendiary heights. Women will rebel against their meaning - yielding themselves for God's fruitfulness will no longer be considered blessed. Then women will deliberately nullify their fertility, even to the unthinkable - aborting life. Then, the flames of rebellion, so apparent on this day of His death, will have reached the dry wood.

Paraphrasing:

“Beware!” says Jesus continuing the words of Hosea, , “things will be so bad, you will wish for a natural calamity to end the horror life has become.”

Lastly, we know from the Gospel of St. John, who was himself at the Cross, that Mary stood there suffering with her Son as he completed his saving work - the twelfth station. Between these three, Jesus, Mary and John, a marvelous transaction takes place. By it Jesus completes his earthly labor, thus fulfilling all Scripture, as the original unpolished Greek makes clear.

Jesus therefore seeing the(his) mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved, says to the (his) mother: Woman, behold the son of thee, Then he says to the disciple: Behold the mother of thee. And from that - hour took the disciple her to his own [Affer this knowing - Jesus that now all things have been finished, that might be fulfilled the scripture, says: I thirst. (John 19:26-28)

Publicly, more than this once, Jesus called his mother “Woman.” In that he named her as a sign for all women. A sign points the way to a destination. Women seeking freedom and the truth about themselves find Mary pointing the only way to both. “Woman!” Her character is revealed on this fateful day: stalwart trust in God, fearless disregard for her reputation long ago given into God’s care; faith that looks beyond man’s hate to God’s generous forgiveness.

A woman of God is unflappable, unself-conscious and forgiving. Strong in the face of evil, her task has been to resist Satan ever since her mother Eve succumbed to his temptations. “He will attack your heel, but you will crush his head,” God’s ancient promise is fulfilled in Mary. All women stand with her. Blessed Edith Stein writes, “The woman is charged with the battle against evil.”

His Mother’s relationship to all future Christians is established in these intense moments Nothing John records is confined to its surface understanding; all has eternal significance. These Greek words state that the relationship of the Mother and the disciple brings salvation history to its crowning point that “fulfills all scripture.” Through John, the beloved disciple, Jesus gave his mother to all disciples to be their mother, too. Each one, when he brings Mary into his home - that is, lives a life integral with her, is preparing for the final consummation of Christ and His Church. When the whole Church has done so, the Bride will be restored, and the Bridegroom will come again. All Scripture will be fulfilled!

We, near the end of the second millennium, are asking, “What is God’s intent in creating woman?” Do we sometimes wish Jesus had been more explicit in delineating God’s role and meaning for women? Perhaps in contemplating these stations of the cross, we may see more clearly the path marked out for us.