

Introduction

“The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.”¹ At the core of the family is the marital relationship between a husband and a wife. In an age when the very institution of marriage is being challenged by secular society on many fronts, there is need for Christian men and women to return once again in great earnest to the font of Christian life and the soul of theology: the Scriptures. Yet perhaps few passages in the Bible give rise to such violent reactions as do those that have to do with marriage and family life, especially the so-called “household codes” of the New Testament.²

Without a doubt, for men and women in western culture, who by and large understand dignity only in terms of equality in all things, the household codes, with passages like, “Wives, be submissive to your husbands”, are some of the most troubling and challenging in all of the Bible. Surely, these texts must be the residue of some awful, long-gone age, when women were treated more like chattel than persons. Surely, these texts must be a reflection of the patriarchal oppression that served as the model for family life until very recently. Or are they? Is it possible that because of our ignorance, our fear, our pride – not to mention our lack of adequate understanding of the relationships within

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media: 1981), 75, hereafter *FC*, quoting his Address to the Confederation of Family Advisory Bureaus of Christian Inspiration (Nov 29, 1980), 3-4; *Insegnamenti* III/2 (1980), 1453-1454. See also Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1995), 94, hereafter *EV*.

² As J. P. Sampley notes, “It is generally agreed that the following passages constitute the NT Haustafel [table of household duties]: Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Tim 2:8-15; 6:1-10; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pet 2:17-3:9;” *And the Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 19. Beyond the New Testament the following texts are usually included: Didache 4:9-11; Letter of Barnabas 19:5-7; 1 Clement 21:6-9; Polycarp to the Ephesians 4:2-6:3.

the Trinity – that we miss out on a very important truth that the Holy Spirit has inspired the sacred author to write – a truth that is essential to married life?³ What is called for, so it seems, is a willingness to approach these texts once again with great reverence and awe. What is needed, so it seems, is for us to let Scripture examine us and not vice versa.

Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, takes such a reverent approach. The Pope’s Letter, written in the Marian Year of 1988, was in large part a response to the 1987 Synod of Bishops request for “a further study of the anthropological and theological bases that are needed in order to solve the problems connected with the meaning and dignity of being a woman and being a man.”⁴ In the course of this Letter the Pope sets out his teaching on *the mutual submission of husband and wife*.⁵ Specifically, the Holy Father writes, “All the reasons in favor of the ‘subjection’ of woman to man must be understood in the sense of a ‘mutual subjection’ of both ‘out of reverence for Christ.’”⁶

³ For an excellent review of the requirement for *all* Christians to take on the attitude of service and submission, see George Kraus, “Subjection: A New Testament Study in Obedience and Servanthood,” *Concordia* 8 (1982): 19-23.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 1, hereafter *MD*.

⁵ See esp. *MD*, 23-25.

⁶ *MD*, 24. Commenting on the Pope’s thought, Prudence Allen adds, “Pope John Paul II...emphasizes that one-sided subjection is more a result of the fallen condition of humanity, and that mutual subjection, flowing from mutual self-gift, is present in the redemptive condition of humanity.” “Sex and Gender Differentiation in Hildegard of Bingen and Edith Stein,” *Communion* 20 (1993): 411.

The biblical foundation for the Pope’s teaching is the Letter to the Ephesians, precisely one of the passages that have the potential to upset so many people.⁷ By drawing our attention once again to this passage of Scripture, the Holy Father challenges scholars and lay alike, who may tend to disregard this text as oppressive (and therefore having no practical significance for Christian husbands and wives today), to return to it with new eyes.⁸

While acknowledging straightforwardly that the text of Ephesians 5:21-33 is “profoundly rooted in the customs and religious tradition of the time”, John Paul II points out “it is to be understood and carried out in a new way.” This new way is because of the “innovation” of Christ.⁹ Because of this “innovation” what may appear as though it has been merely imported from a patriarchal culture is in fact entirely new.

However, the awareness that in marriage there is mutual ‘subjection of the spouses out of reverence for Christ’, and not just that of the wife to the husband, must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behavior and customs. This is a call which from that time onwards, does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew.¹⁰

⁷ At the time of this writing, for example, the Irish bishops have recommended that several texts in Scripture “would be better omitted from the new Lectionary, currently in preparation” in Rome. Among these texts is Eph 5:22-24, which the bishops fear leads to domestic violence. See, “Domestic Violence”, produced jointly by the Commission for Justice and Peace and the Pastoral Episcopal Commission. For a review of this document see David Quinn, “Irish Bishops Blame St. Paul for Battered Women,” *Crisis* 19 (2001): 29-32.

⁸ It is worth noting that the Pope’s teaching upsets members of two, opposite camps. Some oppose his teaching due to their reaction against the idea that wives should be subordinate to their husbands. Others oppose his teaching due to their reaction against the idea that husbands should be subordinate to their wives! Both reactions are addressed in this Chapter.

⁹ See MD, 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

This thesis seeks a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the Pope's teaching. I will approach the topic in the following way: 1) I will attempt to show that the Pope's thought is something that is in accord with scriptural teaching, especially that teaching as it is found in Eph 5:21-33 when properly exegeted; 2) I will attempt to show that it is in keeping with the nature of the human person as someone created in the image and likeness of God, only able to find fulfillment by making a sincere gift of self;¹¹ and, 3) finally, I will try to show that the call to mutual subordination of husband and wife is not something irreconcilable with the scriptural teaching that the husband alone is called "head" of his wife.

The hope is that the doctrine of mutual subordination within marriage will emerge *not* as an innovation, i.e., as some teaching coming from an outside authority figure, but as a reality that flows out of human persons themselves, created in the divine image, an image of communion in profound and radical love.

¹¹ See Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* 24, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport: Costello Publishing Co, 1975).

Chapter One

Introduction

This first chapter focuses on several significant aspects of what one scholar has said is the greatest, wisest and most positive description of marriage yet to be found in Christian literature: Eph 5:21-33.¹² Specifically, it examines how Pope John Paul II's call to "mutual subjection" is in fact an idea that comes from the text itself and is not merely a notion that the Holy Father has read into it. In order to do this, two issues must be examined: 1) whether the exhortation to the wife is oppressive, demeaning, or in any way the vestige of a pagan, patriarchal culture; 2) whether the exhortation to the husband, though not specifically using the word "submit", nevertheless entails the idea of submission. The treatment of these questions first requires a recognition of and a response to several critical observations made about the text of Ephesians 5:21-33. Secondly, it demands a treatment of four crucial terms used by the author of Ephesians.¹³ A careful examination of these words of the sacred author reveals fresh insights into the text itself.

¹² Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* Vol 34 A, *Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 715, hereafter *Ephesians 4-6*.

¹³ It is beyond the scope of this work to enter into a discussion of the authorship of Ephesians. For various treatments on the authorship of Ephesians see Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 36-50; W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians*, NTC 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 32-35; T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), ix-xxiii; A Van Roon, *The Authorship of Ephesians*, trans. S. Proscod-Jokel (Leiden: C.J. Brill, 1979).

The Origin and Content of the Household Codes: Oppressive or Liberating?

There are two principle arguments put forth to claim that Ephesians 5:21-33 is unsuited as a basis for Christian teaching on marriage. The first argument has to do with the *origin* of the household codes. This argument focuses on the similarity that this text, as well as the other New Testament *Haustafeln*,¹⁴ have with both Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish literature. Surely, if this text is to be used as the biblical foundation for a teaching as important as the mutual submission of husband and wife, it should not be grounded in non-biblical anthropology. This is an issue that requires some exploration.

The second argument is earlier, and more serious. It asks why Christian husbands and wives, not to mention the Pope, would even bother to use this text as a source for Christian teaching on marriage. According to this argument, what is present in Ephesians 5:21-33 is nothing less than the enshrinement of a woman's inferiority. It is argued that this text assumes and reinforces "a relation of domination and submission between the sexes."¹⁵ Thus, the problem, according to this second argument, has to do with the *content* itself of the passage. While this may sound extreme to some, it is certainly one of the thoughts that run through not a few persons' minds if and when they hear the words read from the pulpit on a Sunday morning.¹⁶ At first hearing –and without good, solid catechesis– this observation appears to be more than a little valid. In keeping with this line of thought, some authors have gone so far as to argue that "the theology of marriage

¹⁴ This term, first used by Luther, is commonly used to refer to the texts that deal with household order in the New Testament.

¹⁵ A. Thatcher, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993), 16.

¹⁶ Note, for example, that the Second Reading in the Lectionary for the Roman Catholic Church on the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, has an option to bracket out the words that deal with the submission of the wife.

is so integrated into the institution of slavery and the hierarchical order of social relations which slavery services that, once slavery has been repudiated by Christianity, the theology of marriage based upon it must be repudiated also.”¹⁷ The solution, so the argument goes, can be nothing less than a total renouncing of texts like Ephesians 5:21-33.¹⁸

Francois Wessels summarizes the position of this second argument in the following way: “For a number of New Testament scholars, Ephesians represents a phase in the history of early Christianity which, instead of serving as a guideline for Christian living today, should serve as an indication of a wrong development (and therefore as a warning not to repeat the same mistake). These scholars see Ephesians as ‘the first manifesto of Christian imperialism.’”¹⁹

One scholar who subscribes to this view is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In her book, *In Memory of Her*, Fiorenza states the basis for her reaction towards this text. She claims that there was a time in the early Church when women had important roles of leadership in the Christian community, but that as time went on, and pressure was placed

¹⁷ Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, 16.

¹⁸ Thatcher cites with approval a group of women who have formed an “exodus community from patriarchy.” This group performs a liturgy entitled, “Exorcism of Patriarchal Texts.” “As the liturgy is performed, a number of biblical texts deemed to be patriarchal, and so oppressive, are read out. The congregation ‘exorcises’ their oppressive power by the shared public denial of their continued influence upon the community of worshippers. At the end of the service, someone says, ‘These texts and all oppressive texts have lost their power over our lives. We no longer need to apologize for them or try to interpret them as words of truth, but we cast out their oppressive message as expressions of evil and justifications of evil.’” *Liberating Sex*, 24. Rosemary Radford Ruether likewise calls for a rite of “exorcism” of patriarchal texts, including Eph 5:21-23. See *Women-Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 137.

¹⁹ G. F. Wessels, “Ephesians 5:21-33, ‘Wives be subject to your husbands...Husbands love your wives’”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 67 (1989), 67.

upon them by the Roman empire, the household codes were incorporated into the Christian life, bringing about a restriction of that equality so that non-believers would not be offended.²⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx held a similar position. He, too, argued that the early Christian communities, after having embraced for a time a life of egalitarianism, eventually capitulated to pagan norms, specifically, “the non-Christian, pagan, patriarchal household code of the Graeco-Roman family.”²¹

²⁰ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, (New York: Crossroads, 1987), chapters 5,6. The scriptural basis for her argument is Gal 3:28. Discussing the use of this text by feminist theologians, A Duane Litfin writes, “Evangelical feminists claim this as the basic and most potent impetus behind their movement, and they rework everything else to harmonize with this vision...Galatians 3:28 says nothing explicitly whatsoever about how male/female relationships should be conducted in daily life...Paul is here making a theological statement about the fundamental equality of both men and women in their standing before God. Thus any ideas about how this truth should work itself out in social relationships cannot be drawn from the verse, but must be brought to it by one’s broader understanding. To be sure, there is nothing improper in suggesting such practical implications. Galatians 3:28 is not without social ramifications. Quite the opposite. The fundamental oneness in Christ of all Christians does carry profound implications for how Christians are to relate to one another. Our conflict with feminists, however, is in specifying what those implications should be. The feminists insist that the implications *must* be the elimination of all gender-based roles. Why? This conclusion is not logically required. It’s superfluous. One need not dismiss the hierarchy passages unless one assumes the feminist inference from Gal. 3:28, which is by no means necessary.” “Do biblical feminists have a point?” *Moody* December (1979): 20-23. Without wishing to enter into it here, it is to be noted that the feminist interpretation of Gal 3:28 can quite simply be challenged. Francis Martin, in discussing how many feminists have approached the biblical texts, argues that they establish a narrative line “somewhat like this: Jesus established a community of equals, thus obliterating the social and sexual distinctions common to the Judaism of his day. After the resurrection, the early Christian communities, particularly those founded by Paul, continued this egalitarianism, at once profiting from the liberty accorded to women in some parts of the Roman empire and disrupting the caste system still in place. At this point leadership and responsibility were exercised by men and women indifferently, with each community feeling itself free to organize itself according to its needs. Then there occurred a ‘loss of nerve.’ Under the pressure and persecution exerted by the surrounding society, the Christian communities began to capitulate and allow patriarchal modes of life to creep back in, particularly in regard to leadership. This is witnessed by the ‘household order texts’ in the New Testament...This return of patriarchal domination has marked the life of the Church ever since.” *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 89-90. Benedict Ashley also subjects this theory to scrutiny in *Justice in the Church: Gender and Participation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1996), 181-186, as does Albert Vanhoye, SJ, in “Church’s Practice in Continuity with New Testament Teaching,” in *From “Inter Insigniores” to “Ordinatio Sacerdotalis”*: Documents and Commentaries, United States Catholic Conference (Washington, D.C.1998), 151-157, esp. 154. For a discussion of correct and incorrect approaches to doing historical criticism, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), esp. Chapter 4.

²¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads, 1985), 68.

In her treatment of the New Testament *Haustafeln*, Fiorenza argues that what we find there is “an insistence on patriarchal behavior as well as an acceptance of the established political-social status quo of inequality and exploitation in the name of Jesus Christ.”²² In regards to Ephesians 5:21-33 specifically, she states, “feminist theologians contend that [the imagery of Christ as bridegroom and the Church as bride] provides an ideological justification for discrimination and exploitation of women in family and Church.”²³

In fairness, it must be noted that Fiorenza recognizes the command to husbands in Ephesians 5:25 radically calls into question the dominant view of patriarchal domination.²⁴ Christ’s self-giving love for the Church now becomes the model for the husband in relating to his wife.²⁵ Yet, at the same time, she argues, “this Christological modification of the husband’s patriarchal position and duties does not have the power, theologically, to transform the patriarchal pattern of the household code...Instead, Ephesians Christologically cements the inferior position of the wife in the marriage relationship.”²⁶ Her conclusion is

²² Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, quoting K. Thraede, see note 32. For an entirely contrary view of patriarchy, one that sees it as a great good in the service of women and children especially, see Leon Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Co, 1999), 64-68. See also John W. Miller, *Biblical Faith and Fathering: Why We Call God “Father”* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989).

²³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Marriage and Discipleship,” *The Bible Today* 102 (1979), 2028.

²⁴ See Schüssler Fiorenza, “Marriage and Discipleship,” 2031.

²⁵ See Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 269.

²⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 270.

Eph 5:21-33 thus participates in the trajectory of the patriarchal household-code tradition insofar as it takes over the household-code pattern and reasserts the submission of the wife to the husband as a religious Christian duty. At the same time, it modifies the patriarchal code by replacing patriarchal superordination and domination with the Christian command of love to be lived according to the example of Christ. On the whole, however, the author was not able to Christianize” the code...On the contrary, the cultural-social structures of domination are theologized and thereby reinforced.²⁷

Fiorenza’s critique is a serious one, and a response must be given. In order to answer it fully, one must take account of the vocabulary that is used in Ephesians 5:21-33, especially four of the crucial terms used in this passage. It will become clear, in examining this vocabulary, that Fiorenza’s critique misses what John Paul II calls the “innovation” of Christ, and not in any way in accord with the cultural norm wherein the wife was under her husband’s dominion.

The Household-Codes: Culturally Conditioned or Innovative?

At this point it is necessary to return to the first question regarding the origin of the household-codes. What are we to make of the similarity that exists between these and other contemporary examples from non-biblical literature? Is the author of Ephesians merely adopting the worldview of his pagan neighbors as regards husbands and wives? Or is the teaching of Ephesians 5:21-33 an “innovation”? The importance of this question, especially as pertains to the question of submission, is well-stated by Schillebeeckx.

²⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 270. How Fiorenza does not see that the command to love, issued to the husband, does not upset the entire vision of authority is beyond this author. I address this further below in the look at key vocabulary terms.

Are we confronted here with a Christian confirmation of existing ethical forms which are thus presented in the New Testament as an unchangeable norm? Or is this just a call to experience “in the Lord” and from Christian motives the ethical values and social structures already present in society? And, if this latter is the case, is it not also the case that the New Testament, by not rejecting the contemporary situation but simply giving it a Christian motivation, has in effect put it forward as a principle that the actual, existing social structures of this world should be preserved? This question becomes particularly significant when it is considered in the context of the New Testament assertion that the husband is “the head of the wife,” and of the wife’s subordinate position and actual factually inferior status in the ancient world which resulted from this assertion.²⁸

Schillebeeckx summarizes the significance of the issue by saying

In a nutshell, the problem is this: Is the statement, “the husband is the head of the wife,” an authentically biblical assertion, based on revelation, which was of course bound to be experienced in accordance with and within existing social structures? Or is it not a biblical assertion at all, but merely something taken over from the ancient idea of the *pater familias* and expressed in Christian terms?²⁹

Interest in the origins of the household-codes came to the fore around the turn of the twentieth century, especially with the work of Martin Dibelius, who claimed that the

²⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 174.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 176. See 171-201 for his complete views on the matter at hand. It should be observed that Schillebeeckx, like many scholars, concludes that the teaching of the husband’s headship is in accord with the existing social structure of marriage and family. While he acknowledges that the command to husbands to love their wives inwardly transforms the “male position of authority and gave it a primacy of love”, he does not seem to think that this thereby transforms the entire structure as well, thus making marriage an entirely new reality.

major influence behind them was the popular philosophy of the Stoics.³⁰ Since that time, there have been numerous works on the subject.³¹

There are basically three views on the matter.³² The first³³ holds that the New Testament household-codes are essentially of Hellenistic origin (in a general manner as opposed to being situation specific), and the result of the early Christian community coming to terms with the realization that Jesus' return would not be as imminent as they

³⁰ See *An die Kolosser, Epheser, an Philemon*, Third Edition, *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 12* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953).

³¹ See K. Weidinger, *Die Haustafeln, ein Stück urchristliche Paränese* (UNT; Leipzig: J.C. Heinrich, 1928); D. Schroeder, "Die Haustafeln des Neuen Testament (ihre Herkunft und Theologischer Sinn)", (Ph.D. dissertation: Hamburg: Mikrokopie, 1959); P. Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Catechism: A Study in the Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940); David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981); "Neopythagorean Moralists and the New Testament Household Codes", in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Teil II, Band 26*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1982-88), 380-411; "Household Codes", in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres*, ed. David A. Aune (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); W. Munro, "Col III.18-IV.1 and Eph V.21-VI.9: Evidences of a Late Literary Stratum?" *New Testament Studies* 18 (1972): 434-447; M. Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (Anchor Bible Commentary), Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, "First Century Marriage Ethics: A Comparative Study of the Household Codes and Plutarch's Conjugal Precepts"; Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); James D.G. Dunn, "The Household Rules in the New Testament", in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); J. Paul Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh": *A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); William Lillie, "The Pauline Household Codes", *The Expository Times* 86 (1974-5): 179-183; L. Hartman, "Some Unorthodox Thoughts on the 'Household-Code Form', in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Peder Borgen, Ernest S. Frerichs, Richard Horsley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); James E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1972); D.C. Verner *The Household of God. The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBLDS 71 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983).

³² In this summary I am drawing upon the work of Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, esp. 42-47. James Dunn offers a variation on this, saying that the three basic positions are: 1) that there is no effective difference between the Christian texts and those of the Greco-Roman world; 2) that the Christian texts represent a sort of "healthy worldliness"; and, 3) that the Christian texts exhibit a "high degree of conformity to the structures of contemporary society which ought to have been radically questioned... a 'sanctification of the status quo'." See "The Household Rules in the New Testament", 58-9.

³³ See M. Dibelius, *An die Kolosser, Epheser an Philemon*; K. Weidinger, *Die Haustafeln, ein Stück urchristliche Paränese*.

once thought. A second view³⁴ claims that the influence did not come from a pagan Hellenistic culture but from Hellenistic Judaism and/or the teaching of the Old Testament. A third view³⁵ argues that the *Haustafeln* are basically Christian in origin, tracing their roots perhaps as far back as the very teachings of Jesus. Regarding these various views, Witherington writes, “There is no consensus of opinion on these matters, nor is there likely to be in the near future. None of these views is utterly compelling or lacking in weaknesses.”³⁶

Other scholars, however, believe that it is possible to see a clear, discernible influence behind the NT household codes. This influence, they say, stems neither from Stoicism, nor Oriental or Hellenistic Judaism. Instead, “the NT codes are derived from the Hellenistic discussion ‘concerning household management’ (*peri oikonomias*), especially as outlined by Aristotle, *Politics* I 1253b 1-14.”³⁷ Several scholars³⁸ have put

³⁴ See E. Schweizer, “Traditional Ethical Patterns in the Pauline and post-Pauline Letters and Their Development,” *Text and Interpretation*, ed. E. Best and R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 195-209; E. Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, trans. W.R. Poehlmann and R.J. Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafeln*; Lillie, “The Pauline House-hold Tables.”

³⁵ See K.H. Rengstorf, “Die neutestamentlichen Mahnungen an die Frau, sich dem Manne unterzuordnen,” *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum*, ed. W. Foerster (Witten: Luther, 1953), 131-145; Schroeder, “Die Haustafeln des Neuen Testaments.”

³⁶ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 43. See pages 42-43 for a discussion of the various strengths and weaknesses of each view. See also Kathleen O’Brien Wicker, “First Century Marriage Ethics: A Comparative Study of the Household Codes and Plutarch’s Conjugal Ethics”, in *No Famine in the Land. Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie*, ed. James W. Flanagan and Anita Weisbrod Robinson (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 141-153.

³⁷ Balch, “Household Codes”, 26. See also James D.G. Dunn, “The Household Rules in the New Testament”, 49.

³⁸ See also Dieter Lüthmann, “Woman nicht mehr Sklave oder Freier ist. Überlegungen zur Struktur frühchristlicher Gemeinden,” *Wort und Dienst* 13 (1975): 53-83; and “Neutestamentliche Haustafeln und Antike Ökonomie,” *NTS* 27 (1980): 83-97; and Laus Thraede, “Ärger mit der Freiheit. Die Bedeutung von Frauen in Theorie und Praxis der alten Kirche,” in G. Scharffenorth and K. Thraede, “*Freunde in Christus werden...*” *Die Beziehung von Mann und Frau als Frage an Theologie und Kirche* (Gelnhausen/Berlin: Burkhardtthaus, 1977): 35-182; “Frauen im Leben frühchristlicher Gemeinder,” *Una Sancta* 32 (1977): 286-99; “Zum historischen Hintergrund der ‘Haustafeln’ des NT,” in *Pietas. Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, hrsg. E. Dassmann and K.S. Frank, 359-68 (JAC Ergänzungsband 8; Münster, Aschendorff, 1980).

forth various arguments in support of this claim, the most well argued position being that of David Balch.

Balch, focusing primarily on the household-code that is found in 1 Peter 2:17-3:9, claims that by the time of the writing of the New Testament there was already in place a recognized form of discourse about the household and the management therein. Such a recognized form of discourse he identifies as a *topos*.³⁹ A *topos* is generally, though inaccurately, understood to be a set literary form with a relatively stable vocabulary.⁴⁰ In his *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter*, Balch “traces the Greek discussion *peri oikonomias* from Plato and Aristotle through later Middle Platonists and Peripatetics to Stoics, Epicureans, Hellenistic Jews and Neo-pythagoreans, drawing the conclusion that it was a common, popular discussion in philosophical schools and among rhetoricians.”⁴¹

As mentioned above, Balch sees Aristotle’s *Politics* I 1253b 1-14 as something of the paradigm for all discussions *peri oikonomias*. The primary significance for Balch of

³⁹ For further discussion on the notion of the *topos* see D.G. Bradley, “The *Topos* as a Form in the Pauline Paraenesis”, *JBL* 72 (1953): 238-46; T.Y. Mullins, “*Topos* as a New Testament Form”, *JBL* 99 (1980): 541-47; and especially John C. Brunt, “More on the *Topos* as a New Testament Form”, *JBL* 104 (1985): 495-500; and Edward P.J. Corbett, “The *Topoi* Revisited”, in *Rhetoric and Praxis: The Contribution of Classical Rhetoric to Practical Reasoning*, ed. Jean Dietz Moss (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986). Of note also is L. Hartman’s “Some Unorthodox Thoughts on the ‘Household-Code Form’”, in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism. Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Key*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Peder Borgen, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Richard Horsley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 219-232.

⁴⁰ Corbett says that for Aristotle and his contemporaries, “The *topoi* were devices enabling the speaker to find those arguments that would be most persuasive in a given situation.” “The *Topoi* Revisited”, in *Rhetoric and Praxis: The Contribution of Classical Rhetoric to Practical Reasoning*, ed. Jean Dietz Moss (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 45.

⁴¹ Balch, summarizing himself in “Household Codes”, 27; see *Let Wives Be Submissive*, Chs. 2-4.

Politics I is because it “outlines relationships between a) three pairs of social classes, b) which are related reciprocally, and c) it argues that one social class in each of the three pairs is to ‘be ruled.’”⁴² These three factors, the argument continues, became a “common *topos*”, turning up in later philosophical traditions discussing “household management,” and finally emerging in the NT household codes. Balch writes, “Modern historians rarely refer to Aristotle when discussing the NT pattern of submissiveness. But he discusses women, children, and slaves, and the exact outline he gives the *topos* ‘on household management’ in his *Politics* I, written c. 335 B.C., is quite important in determining the origin of the NT codes.”⁴³

The crucial factor for Balch is that both Aristotle (as well as those who follow in his line of thought) and the NT authors break the management of the household into a list of relationships separated into three pairs (wives-husbands, children-parents, and slaves-masters). Largely on the basis of this factor, Balch⁴⁴ argues that he has identified the origin of the NT household codes. However, and of great importance, Balch goes on to

⁴² Balch, “Household Codes”, 26.

⁴³ See Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 33.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 3 *Let Wives Be Submissive*. Balch, it must be mentioned, does rightly observe that Aristotle has a fourth topic of discussion regarding the household, namely money. He also correctly observes that only in the NT are the wives *directly* addressed. More on this last point is mentioned below in the discussion of crucial terms. See 96.

argue that “not only was this *topos* adopted, but, almost out of necessity, the patriarchal principle that it embodied was also embraced.”⁴⁵

Balch also goes on to argue that the primary purpose of the household codes in the New Testament was “apologetic.”⁴⁶ Along with Fiorenza,⁴⁷ Balch imagines an earlier time (“the Jesus movement”) when egalitarianism was the rule for the Christian community. However, due to mounting external pressures, Christians, like their Jewish brothers and sisters, as well as some other cultic associations, needed to show the Romans that they were “compliant residents of the Empire.”⁴⁸ The Romans were suspicious of the cults of Isis and Dionysus, thinking that they encouraged sedition and insubordination, starting with the relationships between men and women in the home. The Romans were likewise suspicious of the cults of Yahweh and Jesus for the same reasons. Accordingly, Jewish writers, like Josephus⁴⁹ and Philo,⁵⁰ wrote “defenses” for their Jewish compatriots, showing that the Empire had nothing to fear – *their* wives were submissive too! In this same vein the NT authors wrote the NT household codes.⁵¹ Balch

⁴⁵ As cited by Francis Martin in an unpublished manuscript, “‘Family Values in the First Century’: The World Which Received the Gospel Message.” Balch argues that the Christians adopted the household code as an apologetic measure against the Roman Empire. “Persons in Roman society were alienated and threatened by some of their slaves and wives who had converted to the new, despised religion, so they were accusing the converts of impiety, immorality, and insubordination. As a defense, the author of 1 Peter encouraged the slaves and wives to play the social roles which Aristotle had outlined; this, he hoped, would shame those who were reviling their good behavior (3:16, 2:12).” *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 109. For a full discussion of Balch’s argument see Part Two *Let Wives Be Submissive*.

⁴⁶ See Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, esp. Chs. 5-6.

⁴⁷ See *intra*, 6ff.

⁴⁸ Balch, “Household Codes,” 29.

⁴⁹ See *Against Apion* II.201, “the woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive...for the authority has been given by God to the man.” (as trans. by Thackeray in *Loeb Classical Library*.)

⁵⁰ See *Apology for the Jews* 7.3.6, “Wives must be in servitude to their husbands,” as quoted by Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 46.

⁵¹ See Balch, “Household Codes,” 28-36.

argues that in incorporating the household codes into the NT, the authors employed what he calls a “selective inculturation.” In this “selective inculturation”, the NT authors borrowed and adapted cultural traits from the donor culture, including even a model for family life.⁵²

Balch’s position, however, has not gone unchallenged. First of all, there is anything but clear consensus that such a thing as a *topos* ever existed for marriage and family life. Despite the evidence Balch amasses, Witherington responds by saying it is

not impressive when it is asserted that there was a “fixed” *topos* based on the evidence that the duties of masters, husbands, fathers and their subordinates are discussed together in authors ranging from Aristotle to Hierocles...The repeated juxtaposition of husbands, masters, father and/or wives, slaves, children, coupled occasionally with a mention of their respective duties, is not impressive in view of the fact that these were the regular members of the family from well before the NT era until long after it. The fact that various authors over a wide period of time discuss precisely these three groups and usually manifest a patriarchal orientation does not demonstrate a chain of literary dependency.⁵³

Francis Martin also critiques Balch’s usage of the term *topos* to describe household management. Balch argues that one of the most striking similarities between the NT texts and those having an Aristotelian influence was the teaching regarding the three-pairs of relationships: wife-husband, children-father (parents), slaves-master. This

⁵² See Balch, “Household Codes,” 33. In response to the idea of “egalitarianism” in the early Church, Norbert Baumert insightfully and charitably asks, “Is it seriously possible that, with great largeness of heart, the first community actually initiated a revolutionary change like ecclesiological-social equality between men and women, and then immediately abandoned it, so that it is never mentioned again in the letters and had almost completely disappeared by the second generation, but may still be detected by us as characteristic of the first generation after exhaustive labors working on extremely scanty material? ... A thoroughgoing transformation in such basic paradigms of behavior as gender roles cannot take place in a few years (and then be as quickly reversed), and also not in a single generation, as a look at contemporary history shows.” *Woman and Man in Paul: Overcoming a Misunderstanding*, trans. By Patrick Madigan, S.J., and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 210, 211.

⁵³ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 43-4.

is claimed to be a key identifier of the household management *topos*. Martin, however, points out that many of the Hellenistic texts⁵⁴ do not have this three-pair structure, and of the eleven⁵⁵ Christian household-code texts commonly agreed on by scholars, there are only *two* that have it (Colossians and Ephesians). Furthermore, Martin argues, within the Christian texts there is no standardized vocabulary.⁵⁶ Given the fact that so many households were composed of a basic structure (marriage, children, and slaves) is it so odd that most discussions of the same households would discuss one or more of these very relationships? One hardly thinks so. How could any author avoid talking of them if he were to give advice?

Witherington also undertakes a critical comparison and contrast between the text that Balch identifies as “the most important parallel to the N.T. codes” (*Politics* I) and the NT codes.⁵⁷ First, Witherington notes, there is a vast difference in the language employed. Unlike the NT household-codes, which uses the words *άνδρες* and *γυναίκες* to

⁵⁴ See e.g., Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.199, Loeb Classical Library (LCL), Vol 1, trans. F.C. Babbitt, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1926), 372; Musonius, *Or. XIII B, What is the Chief End of Marriage?* 90, 13-14, in *Musonius Rufus. The Roman Socrates*, in Yale Classical Series, ed. and trans. C. Lutz (New Haven: Yale University, 1947); Philo, *Apology for the Jews* 7.3, 6, LCL, Vol. 9, trans. F.C. Babbitt, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1941), 424-425; Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 142, E. in *Moralia*, LCL, Vol. 2, trans. F.C. Babbitt, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1928), 322-3.

⁵⁵ See note 2 above.

⁵⁶ Francis Martin, unpublished manuscript, “‘Family Values in the First Century’: The World Which Received the Gospel Message”; also Martin, *The Feminist Question*, 355.

⁵⁷ See Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 34. The complete text, which Balch calls “the most important parallel to the NT codes” is translated as follows by him: “Now it is clear what are the component parts of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management (*οίκονομία*); for every state is composed of households (*έξ οίκιών*). Household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed; and the household in its perfect form consists of slaves and freemen. The investigation of everything should begin with its smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are *master and slave, husband and wife, father and children* (*δεσπότης και δούλος, και πόσις και άλοχος, και πατήρ και τέκνα*); we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these *three* relationships, I mean that of mastership (*δεσποτική*), that of marriage (*γαμική*)...and thirdly the progenitive relationship (*τεκνοποιητική*)... There is also a department which some people consider the same as household management and others the most important part of it...: I mean what is called the art of getting wealth”, 33-4.

refer to husband and wife, Aristotle uses the terms πόσις καί άλοχος. With respect to authority and submission, the NT employs the words κεφαλή and ύποτάσσω, but Aristotle uses το άρχειν καί άρχεσθαι. Second, whereas the NT author uses imperatives directed to individuals, Aristotle does not. Third, whereas the NT household-codes are specific exhortations directed to individuals, Aristotle offers abstract speculation, or “a general ethical discussion of the subject.”⁵⁸ To conclude, Witherington argues that Balch has produced evidence that “shows that the discussion of social relationships was not a Jewish or Christian innovation, but it hardly demonstrates the reality or even the origin of a *Haustafel*.”⁵⁹ Dunn agrees.

Clearly the Christian *Haustafeln* do not express a distinctively Christian concern. The concern evident in the Christian texts... was a common concern to the Christians because it was a common concern more widely shared. That is also to say the Christian *Haustafeln* cannot be regarded as a distinctively Christian creation. However, neither would it be accurate to say that the Christians simply took over a traditional or contemporary form.⁶⁰

Witherington also challenges the claim that the NT authors were writing in line with Jewish writers like Josephus and Philo. Again, he notes significant differences in vocabulary, as well as overall content.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 44.

⁵⁹ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 44. For an overview and critique of the various views on the origins of the *Haustafel* see 44-47.

⁶⁰ Dunn, “The Household Rules in the New Testament”, 53.

⁶¹ See Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 45-47; Barth also states that Josephus differs from Eph 5:22-23 both “linguistically and in substance,” see *Ephesians 4-6*, 618, note 35.

What we may conclude from Josephus and some of the material in Philo and Plutarch is that the concept of the wife's submission was a topic discussed in the NT era usually with strong patriarchal overtones. We do not find, however, a duty table or any real discussion of reciprocal duties. More often we hear of the duties of the wife and the authority of the husband. Absent also are imperatives...I conclude that while discussion of household management was a standing topic in antiquity both before and during the NT era, I can find no direct evidence of a household table. Certainly, there is nothing similar to what we find in the NT with reciprocal pairs that are addressed directly with imperatives.⁶²

Witherington finds nothing unreasonable in the possibility that the NT codes, with their new content and vocabulary, originated with the NT authors themselves.

It is possible that the household pattern as we find it in the NT originated with Paul himself, though he would be drawing on a host of ethical material inherited both from his Jewish heritage and possibly from the wider pagan milieu. As C.F.D. Moule points out, it is certainly not the case that we have here a slightly Christianized Hellenistic or even Hellenistic Jewish duty code.⁶³

And again, "Paul is not urging conformity to society's norms or what is 'natural' (whether for apologetic reasons or otherwise) but conformity to Christ. His behavior was the ultimate norm and pattern for Christian behavior."⁶⁴

Markus Barth, too, challenges the whole idea of the early Christians merely adapting, for whatever reason, a Jewish or Hellenistic manner of discussing marriage and the household. In his Anchor Bible Commentary on Ephesians he writes

⁶² Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 46-7; see also R. P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 69-70.

⁶³ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 47.

⁶⁴ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 51.

In this passage [5:21-33] both topics [the husband/wife relationship and the Christ/church relationship] are central, and both are ontologically and noetically so closely tied together that they cannot be unstrung – not even for the reconstruction of an original, supposedly Jewish or Greek *Haustafel*... The dominant role of Christ in Paul's argument casts doubt upon the widespread theory that in this *Haustafel* Christ or some other Christian formulae are placed in the service of a marriage concept inherited or recast by Paul from the views and customs of his environment.⁶⁵

Barth concludes his wider discussion of Ephesians 5:21-6:9 by saying

The content of the *Haustafel* (5:21-6:9) is thoroughly permeated by references to the Lord. Step by step it is totally dependent upon the reality and validity of Christ's work and his presence. For this reason it is impossible to reconstruct from it supposedly 'original' Jewish or Greek tables of moral advice, and to assume that their 'Christianization' took place by adding a series of glosses. No pagan ideology or social pattern can be Christianized by sugar-coating. The ethics of Ephesians is in the so-called *Haustafel* as much as in its other main parts an original witness of faith, and an invitation for a genuine public testimony to Jesus Christ who created 'one new man' (2:15) out of divided people.⁶⁶

Summary

In this section I have outlined two of the most common arguments against Ephesians 5:21-33. These two arguments object that Ephesians 5:21-33 is unsuited for teaching about Christian marriage because of its *origin* and because of its *content*. While I have begun to answer those two objections, it is only by looking at the vocabulary of Ephesians 5:21-33 that the fullest rebuttal emerges. In the language employed here the "innovation" of the sacred author most stands out, proving it to be "neither a return to legalism" nor a seeking "refuge in compromise with Jewish or pagan standards of conduct."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 655.

⁶⁶ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 758.

⁶⁷ See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 622, note 51.

The setting of Ephesians 5:21-33

Certainly, Ephesians 5:21-33 is a gold-mine of rich vocabulary worthy of prayerful and attentive mining, however, I wish here to concentrate my attention on four particular terms: ὑποτάσσω, κεφαλή, ἀγάπη, and παρέδωκεν.⁶⁸ These four terms will serve to show 1) how the exhortation to wife is not patriarchal and demeaning, and, 2) how the exhortation to the husband entails the idea of submission to his wife. Additionally, in looking at these four terms there will be evidence enough to show that what is being said to *both* husband and wife is not something merely borrowed from the culture at large, but owing its origin and content to nothing less than the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of Christ.

It is important first of all to briefly locate our passage within the wider perspective of the entire Letter. Ephesians is generally divided into two main sections: Chapters 1-3 and 4-6.⁶⁹ The first section generally deals with the theological foundations upon which the second – an ethical and religious – section builds.⁷⁰ Schnackenburg entitles the second section, in which Ephesians 5:21-33 is placed, as “Realising Christian Existence in Church and World.”⁷¹ This he then further subdivides into four sub-sections: 1) The Church as the Sphere of Christian Existence (4:1-16), 2) Christian Existence in a Pagan

⁶⁸ For a full exegesis of Eph 5:21-33, see Barth’s commentary in *Eph 4-6*.

⁶⁹ See, for example, R.W. Wall, “Wifely Submission in the Context of Ephesians,” *Christian Scholars Review* 17 (1988), 274ff.

⁷⁰ See John Wick Bowman, “The Gospel and the Christian Family. An Exposition of Ephesians 5:22 to 6:9,” *Interpretation* 1 (1947), 437. Pope John Paul II divides the Letter to the Ephesians in a two-fold way: 1) a presentation of the divine plan of salvation of man in Jesus Christ, and 2) more detailed instructions to the community given this divine plan. See *The Theology of the Body. Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), 306-309; 324-326, hereafter *TB*.

⁷¹ See *The Epistle to the Ephesians. A Commentary* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991), 158-266. Barth sees this section as God’s call to man to live a wholly new life, see *The Broken Wall*, 200.

Environment (4:17-5:14), 3) The Life of the Christian Congregation (5:15-6:9), and, 4), The Battle Against the Powers of Evil in the World (6:9-6:20).⁷² The third, and for our purposes most important sub-section, is again divided into two parts: spiritual life in the congregation (5:15-20), and the behavior of married people with reference to Christ and his church (5:21-33).⁷³

*Ephesians 5:21-33: Translation*⁷⁴

²¹ *Because you fear Christ, subordinate yourselves to one another –*²² *[e.g.] wives to your husbands – as to the Lord.*²³ *For [only] in the same way that the Messiah is the head of the church – he, the savior of his body – is the husband the head of his wife.*²⁴ *The difference notwithstanding, just as the church subordinates herself [only] to the Messiah, so wives to your husbands in everything.*²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as [we confess], the Messiah has loved the church and has given himself for her*²⁶ *to make her holy by [his] word and clean by the bath in water,*²⁷ *to present to himself the church resplendent free from spot or wrinkle or any such thing so that she be holy and blameless.*²⁸ *In the same manner also husbands owe it [to God and man] to love their wives for they are their bodies. In loving his wife a man loves himself.*²⁹ *For no man ever hates his own flesh, but he provides and cares for it – just as the Messiah for the church*³⁰ *because we are members of his body.*³¹ *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*³² *This [passage] has an eminent secret meaning: I, for one, interpret it [as relating] to Christ and the church.*³³ *In any case, one by one, each one of you must love his wife as himself, and the wife...may she fear her husband.*

⁷² See *The Epistle to the Ephesians. A Commentary*, 158-266.

⁷³ See *The Epistle to the Ephesians. A Commentary*, 232-258. Baumert, agreeing with Baltensweiler and Lindemann, argues against Schnackenburg that 5:15-33 is to be divided as follows: 1) Spirit-filled life in the community (5:15-21), 2) Exhortation to wives (5:22-24), 3) Exhortation to husbands (5:25-28a), 4) Motivating the husbands through an explanation of “self-love” (5:28b-32), and, 5) Final exhortation to husbands and wives. See *Woman and Man in Paul. Overcoming a Misunderstanding*, 216. It should be noted that there is no clear consensus as to where the *haustafeln* begins: is it with verse 21 or with verse 22? On the basis of the motif “fear of the Lord”, which serves as a manner of inclusion in v. 21 and v. 33, Baumert and Schnackenburg agree that the unit should start with v. 21.

⁷⁴ The following translation is from Barth’s *Ephesians 4-6*, 607.

A number of initial, critical observations are worth making here. First, it is to be noted that this text best fits the genre of *exhortation*, and not that of abstract speculation (as do Aristotle's). Second, there is a remarkable lack of "practical advice" being offered. Instead the focus is more on "being" and not "doing", on taking on a new attitude or mode of existing.⁷⁵ Third, each of the parties involved (wives and husbands) is addressed *directly* and as *equals*.⁷⁶ Fourth, the passage begins with an exhortation to the entire community to subordinate themselves to each other.⁷⁷ Fifth, in verse 22 and verse 24b (those which directly address wives), there is no verb present. Wives are not directly told to subordinate themselves, rather, in each verse, the verb has to be carried over from the preceding verse, and in both of those verses the husband is a member (of the whole community and of the church).⁷⁸ Sixth, and finally, almost seventy per cent of the text is addressed to the *husband*. Three times they are *commanded* to love their wives using imperatives.⁷⁹ Wives, on the other hand, are not commanded to love their husbands, but rather, are "invited to do so."⁸⁰ As Guillemette notes

⁷⁵ See Wall, "Wifely Submission in the Context of Ephesians," 275.

⁷⁶ This second point serves to highlight once again that this text is not a third person description of what the home should be.

⁷⁷ On the striking nature of such a command to mutual subordination, see John Grabowski, "Mutual Submission and Trinitarian Self-Giving," *Angelicum* 74 (1997), 492-3; Wessels, "Wives be subject to your husbands," 70-71; Lillie, "The Pauline House-tables," 182; J.E. Toews, "Paul's Radical Vision for the Family," *Direction* 19 (1990), 33.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between v. 21 and 22 and v. 24a and 24b, see Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 608-613; E. Rivera, "'Wives, Be Subject to Your Husbands'", *Philippiana Sacra* 3 (1968), 232; Miletic, "One Flesh", 27-31; 41-46; 87-98; 99-111; Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 240-248; Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 56-58; Sampley, "And the Two Shall Become One Flesh", 114-126; D. Fennema, "Unity in Marriage: Ephesians 5,21-33", *Reformed Review* 25 (1971), 64.

⁷⁹ See A. P. O'Hagan, "The Wife According to Eph. 5:22-33," *Australasian Catholic Record* 53 (1976), 24. Note also that the author avoids three times using imperatives to the wife. See also Fennema, "Unity in Marriage," 65; Toews, "Paul's Radical Vision for the Family," 32, 34, 35.

⁸⁰ Toews, "Paul's Radical Vision for the Family," 32, also 34.

If Paul had confined himself to the current ideas of his time, he would naturally have emphasized exclusively the inferior status of the wife in respect to her husband of whom she is the servant. But Paul does the contrary and highlights with a special emphasis the husband's vocation. By doing so, Paul was laying down for the husband demands which were inconceivable among the Jews as well as among the Greeks.⁸¹

O'Hagan adds, Ephesians 5:21-33 highlights "the primacy of obligation placed upon the man...Imagine the astonishment felt at Ephesians' New Law of marriage by a patriarchal world...After this, marriage must never be the same again."⁸²

Vocabulary

ὑποτάσσω

"Because you fear Christ subordinate yourselves to one another – [e.g.] wives to your husbands as to the Lord...just as the church subordinates herself [only] to the Messiah, so wives to your husbands – in everything" (Eph 5:21-22, 24).⁸³

There is no disagreement that Ephesians 5:21-33 calls for the subordination of the wife. Indeed, that is precisely the point of contention for so many! To be certain, the first phrases that strike the listener, invariably, are "Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord" (22), and, "As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands" (24b).⁸⁴ The common reaction is that this is demeaning and oppressive, that it strips the wife of her dignity. It is also commonly objected that the sacred author is simply borrowing a common means of speaking about the relationship

⁸¹ N. Guillemette, "Saint Paul and Women," *East Asian Pastoral Review (Manila)* 26, no. 2 (1989), 127.

⁸² O'Hagan, "The Wife According to Eph. 5:22-33," 18, 24.

⁸³ As translated by Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 607.

⁸⁴ English translations of *ὑποτάσσω* vary, and often serve as good evidence for those who claim that the term is oppressive and domineering – the RSV, Amplified Bible, New English Bible and New American Standard translate it as "be subject", the NAB as "be subordinate", and the Authorized Version and NIV as "submit."

between a husband and wife from the patriarchal culture at large, and importing it into the Christian home under a theological justification.⁸⁵ The questions to be answered here, then, are: 1) “What did (and does) this exhortation mean to wives?” and 2) “Is it qualified in any way?” That is, is there a “guide” for the wife to follow other than the culture at large?

It was noted above that *ὑποτάσσω* is not a disposition expected merely of wives, let alone of women in general. It is to be the attitude of the entire Christian community towards one another.⁸⁶ This is so because it was the attitude and disposition of Jesus himself.⁸⁷ Any who would seek to follow him must follow as he leads: “You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:42-45).⁸⁸ Submission, obedience, sacrifice and service

⁸⁵ See Aldunate, “The Three Submissions and Continual Renewal,” *Concilium* 39 (1968): 24-25; Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*, 95-109; Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 251-279; Schillebeeckx, *Marriage*, 137-8, 171-200.

⁸⁶ Again I refer the reader to Kraus, “Subjection”, for an excellent overview of this reality. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, “A Word on ‘Humanae Vitae’”, in *New Elucidations*, trans. Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 204-228.

⁸⁷ See Phil 2:1-11. For an illustration of Jesus’ human life embodying this same word see Luke 2:51. See also Jn 3:17; 5:19,30,43; 7:16-18,28,29; 8:38,42; 12:44-50; 15:10; 17:1-26 for further indications of Jesus’ attitude of obedience and submission to the Father.

⁸⁸ “Jesus Christ demonstrates rather than loses his dignity by his subordination to the Father. When a person is voluntarily amenable to another, gives way to him, and places himself at his service, he shows greater dignity and freedom than an individual who cannot bear to be a helper and partner to anyone but himself.” Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 714. See also Luke 22:26. Ashley, in *Justice in the Church*, p. 46, cites with approval as well the work of Lucile Villey, *Soumission: Thème et variations aux temps apostoliques: La fonction d’une preposition ‘hypo’* (Paris: Beauchense, 1992), saying that she shows how submission is a Christian theme, owing its origins to Christ’s submission to the Father. Thus, she says, because of this, human submission is elevated.

are not for one gender only; they are at the very core of the Christian life, for men as well as women, husbands as well as wives.⁸⁹ As would be appropriate, then, Paul begins his discussion of the *Haustafeln* with an exhortation to the entire community to subordinate themselves to each other.⁹⁰

In general Greek usage, in the active voice, the verb *ὑποτάσσω* meant “to place under”, or “to subordinate.”⁹¹ It was commonly used in regards to civic and military life.⁹² In the middle voice it meant “to subject oneself”, “to be subservient”, or “to submit voluntarily.”⁹³ “In the first instance, then, *ὑποτάσσομαι* does not mean so much ‘to obey’ – though this may result from self-subordination – or to do the will of someone but rather ‘to lose or surrender one’s own rights or will.’”⁹⁴

In regard to marriage, it is most important to note that in pagan and Jewish literature before, during, and after the time of Paul, this was not a common word used to refer to a wife’s relationship to her husband. In fact, in all of pagan and Jewish literature

⁸⁹ See Robert Wild, “‘Be Imitators of God’: Discipleship in the Letter to the Ephesians,” in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 127-143.

⁹⁰ There is no clear consensus on where the *Haustafeln* begins: is it with v. 21 or v. 22? Barth, Baumert and Schnackenburg agree that it should start with v. 21. Miletic argues that v. 22 is “grammatically dependent” upon v. 21, and yet at the same time v. 22 is introducing a new subject, i.e., the *Haustafeln*. See his “*One Flesh*”, 30.

⁹¹ See G. Delling, “*ὑποτάσσω*”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, VIII, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, Vol VIII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1972), 39-40.

⁹² See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 709; S. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1980), 81.

⁹³ See Delling, “*ὑποτάσσω*”, 39-40; Barth *Ephesians 4-6*, 709.

⁹⁴ Delling, “*ὑποτάσσω*”, 40.

on marriage, this word occurs only *two* times!⁹⁵ In response to the objection above, it should be noted that, linguistically speaking, *ὑποτάσσω* is anything but a common way of discussing a wife's relationship to her husband. Typically, she was told to "obey" her husband, who was thought to be superior – not only physically but rationally.⁹⁶ Ephesians is not the mere "baptizing" of a common expression. Instead, on the level of language, it is virtually brand new. It is nothing less than a novel means of discussing the marital relationship.

In Pauline literature, this verb appears 23 times.⁹⁷ Of these 23 occurrences, one must differentiate between 1) the active voice and, 2) the middle or passive indicatives, participles or imperatives of the verb.⁹⁸ In the first use, "the power to subject is attributed to God alone."⁹⁹ However, *ὑποτάσσω* is not found in the active voice in Ephesians 5:21 and 5:24a. In v. 22 and 24b, where wives are the subjects of the sentences, it should be read in the middle voice with imperative force.¹⁰⁰ It is best translated as "to place oneself at the disposition of."¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ See Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 46; Barth *Ephesians 4-6*, 709, note 382; P. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, ed. Glenn W. Barker, David A. Hubbard, John D.W. Watts, Ralph P. Martin. Vol 44, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 221. One text is Plutarch's *Advice to Bride and Groom* 142, E, *Moralia*, Loeb Classical Library (1928): 2:322-3; the second is Pseudo-Callisthenes *hist. Alexandri Magni* I, 22.

⁹⁶ See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 708, 714. It is important to note as well that a different word is used for children (6:1) and slaves (6:5), where "obedience" is the accurate sense. In Pauline literature, wives are never told to obey their husbands.

⁹⁷ See Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 50; Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 709-710. See also Delling, 41-45.

⁹⁸ See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 709-710; see also Delling, 41-45.

⁹⁹ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 709.

¹⁰⁰ According to Miletic. See "One Flesh", 28-9. Witherington says that it is in the present tense and in the middle voice. See Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 50.

¹⁰¹ See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 714, note 405.

Paul uses this form of the verb to describe various relationships, including the relationship of *Christ to God*, the relationships between members of the Christian community to each other, and the relationships between members of a household and its head.¹⁰² The overall sense of the word is to be understood as “a voluntary attitude of giving in, of cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.”¹⁰³ “The implication is that *the one ‘subjecting himself’ does so through an act of his sovereign will and that he could equally have elected to have done otherwise.*”¹⁰⁴ Contrary to any suggestion that a wife is given some isolated command simply to obey, or to be a slave of her husband, the verb clearly associates the idea of a person, full of dignity and deserving respect, being freely addressed and exhorted to make a choice to take on this attitude, which is to be the attitude of the entire Christian community towards each other.¹⁰⁵ So, then, this word does not carry any insulting connotations along with it.

What, though, is the specific motivation for the wife to freely take on this attitude? Unlike pagan or Jewish texts dealing with the relationship of a wife towards her husband, the context in Ephesians 5:21-33 is entirely Christological.¹⁰⁶ The motivation for all Christian behavior is nothing less than the event of God-made-man, who freely handed over his life for us and for our salvation. Nothing else determines the Christian life. The wife has held before her eyes the model of the church’s submission to the Lord.

¹⁰² See 1 Cor 15:28; Eph 5:21-33; 1 Cor 14:32. For further uses of this verb in the middle voice, see 1 Cor 14:32; Luke 2:51; Rom 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13; 5:5; Jas 4:7.

¹⁰³ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 710. See also O’Hagan, “The Wife According to Ephesians 5:22-33,” 22.

¹⁰⁴ Bowman, “The Gospel and the Christian Family,” 443.

¹⁰⁵ See Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 50; Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 611, 712; Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 246.

¹⁰⁶ See Wessels, “Wives be subject to your husbands,” 71.

What should become clear, then, is that the church's attitude of submission is a *response* to Christ's prior initiative (laying down his life).¹⁰⁷ Can anyone seriously believe that the church loses her dignity by responding in this way to the Lord who gave his life for her? Is it degrading or demeaning for her to place herself at the disposition of such a loving Lord? Indeed, the church "loves to be his maid, otherwise she is not the true church."¹⁰⁸

Modeled on the church, the wife's attitude and disposition is also to be a *response*: "...just as the church subordinates herself [only] to the Messiah, so wives to your husbands" (5:24).¹⁰⁹ As Barth says, speaking to wives, "You have the right to receive love and care...Subordination to love? Indeed! Only this and nothing else is preached in Eph 5:21-33."¹¹⁰ Kahler adds, "Considering the 'subordination of the Church' to Christ, it would not occur to anyone to think of 'compulsory' subordination...No one would consider the Church as passive...Her love consists, among others, in that she moves in her own accord to place herself in the position where He can embrace her. Her subordination is answer to His love."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Note that this is an *action*. Earl Muller makes the helpful notation the wife is "active in her subordination." The verb is ὑποτάσσεσθε not ὑπακούετε. See *Trinity and Marriage in Paul: The establishment of a Communitarian Analogy of the Trinity Grounded in the Theological Shape of Pauline Thought* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 95.

¹⁰⁸ See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 620.

¹⁰⁹ Clearly, the response owed to the Lord by the church to the Lord has some unique features, for example, faith. However, the model of the church's response is the model for the wife's response: trusting submission to one who loves her.

¹¹⁰ See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 620; see also 713.

¹¹¹ As quoted by Rivera, "Wives, Be Subject to Your Husbands," 243. It is also to be noted again that just how the wife is to subordinate herself is not spelled out. We are confronted in this text not with advice for specific patterns of behavior, but with the attitude we are to have as Christians from which behavior springs.

If the wife is making a response, then, there necessarily must be an initiator, someone to whom she is responding. Thus, while the modern listener is most often struck by the exhortation to wives, the true weight of the passage deals with the husband who is that initiator. Specifically, the weight of the passage deals with the *command* – repeated three times (vv. 25, 28, 33) – that he love his wife. What at first glance appears as a command to the wife to take a position of passive obedience, offering the husband authority and power, in reality invites the wife to assume an attitude in response to her husband’s headship. It now must be shown how this passage enjoins the husband, precisely as head, to submit to his wife.

*κεφαλή, αγάπη, and παρέδωκεν*¹¹²

“For [only] in the same way that the Messiah is the *head* of the Church – he, the savior of his body – is the husband the *head* of his wife...Husbands, *love* your wives, just as [we confess], the Messiah has *loved* the church and *has given himself up for her* ... In the same manner also husbands *owe it [to God and man] to love* their wives ... In any case, one by one, each of you *must love* his wife as himself” (Eph 5:23,25, 28, 33).¹¹³

We saw above that a common, though uneducated, response to *υποτάσσω* is that it is a demeaning word, stripping the wife of any and all dignity. A similar response, but in the opposite direction, greets the term *κεφαλή*, which appears in v.23. Frequently, it is asserted that this term is merely borrowed from the culture of the day, which saw the

¹¹² Because the headship (*κεφαλή*) of the husband is specified by his love (*αγάπη*), a love that must be willing to hand itself over (*παρέδωκεν*) for the beloved, I am treating these three words together in this section.

¹¹³ As translated by Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 607.

husband as the autocratic leader and ruler of the household.¹¹⁴ Certainly, this text has been abused throughout history, with men interpreting it to mean that they have a God-given superiority over their wives. However, to claim that Ephesians 5:21-33 promotes such a view is to be deaf to the qualifiers that are placed upon the husband's headship.¹¹⁵

Headship in Eph 5:21-33 is not something that stands as a result of nature or of some supposed superiority of body or mind; its only foundation is Christ. Paul does not write of the headship of the husband apart from Christ's headship. As the Lord exercises his headship, thus – and *only* thus – does the husband exercise his. Guillemette notes: “In this perspective words like domination, rights and prerogatives lose their meaning. From the outset Paul modifies radically the terms of the problem...What he seeks to enkindle among the men is a new attitude: ‘Husbands, *love* your wives.’”¹¹⁶ “Christ is not depicted as a supreme example of male superiority over woman. Rather, the ‘husband’s’ function as ‘head’ is modeled after (and limited by) the measure of Christ’s headship. Thus, not an absolute, but only a very qualified role as ‘head’ is attributed to man.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ See Schillebeeckx, *Marriage*, 171-201; Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 617-618. Ashley also treats at length the how the Bible shows how headship is freed from any idea of abuse or domination. See, *Justice in the Church*, esp. 98-125.

¹¹⁵ To reason that the same word (or words) has the same meaning (or meanings) regardless of who uses them is to be blind to a principle called *sublation*. Bernard Lonergan explains this principle in the following way: “What sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context.” *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 241.

¹¹⁶ Guillemette, “Saint Paul and Women,” 127.

¹¹⁷ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 614.

The word *κεφαλή* (“head”) appears in the NT in a number of places.¹¹⁸ It is used both in regard to literal references to heads of men or of animals, and of figurative references to men, God, or demons.¹¹⁹ Much of the discussion regarding figurative references to *κεφαλή* centers on 1 Cor 11:3, and whether or not *κεφαλή* should be translated as “source” or “authority over.”¹²⁰ Often, scholars end up arguing for an exclusive meaning of the term to the exclusion of the other meaning. However, Miletic has offered some refreshing common sense by stating that he is skeptical as to whether one has to (or can) reduce the semantic range of *κεφαλή* to an either/or question. The

¹¹⁸ Miletic lists the following as places within the undisputed Pauline corpus where *κεφαλή* appears: Rom 12:20; 1 Cor 11:3 (3x), 4 (2x), 5 (2x), 7, 10; 12:21. Within the disputed Pauline corpus he lists: Col 1:18; 2:10, 19; Eph 1:22; 4:16; 5:23 (2x). “*One Flesh*”, 69, note 10.

¹¹⁹ See H. Schlier, “kephale”, in *TDNT*, III, 679-681.

¹²⁰ See S. Bedale, “The Meaning of kephale in the Pauline Epistles,” *Journal of New Testament Studies* 5 (1954): 211-215; R. E. Cervin, “Does kephale Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority over’ in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989): 85-112; L. Cope, “1 Cor 11:2-16: One Step Further,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 435-436; J. Delobel, “1 Cor 11, 2-16: Towards a Coherent Interpretation.” In *L’Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style, et Conception de Ministère*, ed. Albert Van Hove (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986): 369-389; P.S. Fiddes, “Woman’s ‘Head’ is Man: A Doctrinal Reflection upon a Pauline Text,” *BaptQ* 31 (1986): 370-383; J. Fitzmyer, “Another Look at kephale in 1 Cor 11:3,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 503-511; J. Fitzmyer, “Kephale in 1 Cor 11:3,” *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52-59; J. Fitzmyer, “A Feature of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of 1 Cor XI.10,” *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957): 48-58; W. Grudem, “Does kephale (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985): 38-59; W. Grudem, “The Meaning of kephale (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 3-72; M. D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor 11:10,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964): 410-416; C.C. Kroeger, “The Classical Concept of *Head* as ‘Source’,” in *Equal to Serve*, ed. G. Gaebelien (Old Tappan: Revell, 1987); B. Mickelsen and A. Mickelsen, “Does Male Dominance Tarnish Our Translations?” *Christianity Today* 5 (1979): 23-29; B. Mickelsen and A. Mickelsen, “The ‘Head’ of the Epistles,” *Christianity Today* 20 (1981): 20-23; Earl Muller, S.J., *Trinity and Marriage in Paul: The Establishment of a Communitarian Analogy of the Trinity Grounded in the Theological Shape of Pauline Thought* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 160-174; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Cor 11:2-16 Once Again,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 265-274; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. J.A. Fitzmyer, R.E. Brown, and R.E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990); Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Interpolations in 1 Corinthians,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 81-94; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 482-500; R. Scroggs, “Paul and the Eschatological Woman,” *JAAR* 40 (1972): 283-303; R. Scroggs, “Paul and the Eschatological Woman: Revisited,” *JAAR* 42 (1974): 532-537; G. W. Trompf, “On Attitude Toward Women in Paul and Paulinist Literature: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and its Context,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 196-215; W.O. Walker, “1 Corinthians and Paul’s View Regarding Women,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 94-110.

textual evidence seems to enable one to conclude that the word can have both meanings: “source” *and* “authority over.”¹²¹

It is most important to note that the discussion in Ephesians, while using a vocabulary similar to 1 Cor 11:3, is of an entirely different nature.¹²² The key issue in 1 Cor 11:3 is authority. The key issue in Eph 5:21-33 is not authority, but unity and the organic relationship between husband and wife.¹²³ Thus, the reader must be alert to the fact that *κεφαλή*, as it appears in Eph 5:23, can only be understood by the context of the wider passage (5:21-33).¹²⁴

How is the husband called to subordinate himself to his wife in Eph 5:21-33? The startling paradox is that the husband is called to subordinate himself *precisely in the exercise of his role as “head” of his wife*. So it is that this expression, which triggers cries of patriarchy and domination, becomes the very way in which the husband *serves* his wife. With Jesus as his model, and the Holy Spirit as the active agent in his life, it is the husband’s role to “go ahead”, as Barth says, and take the initiative in leading his wife

¹²¹ See Miletic, “*One Flesh*”, 76, note 31. For a development of this see Miletic, 67-87.

¹²² See Wall, “Wifely Submission in the Context of Ephesians,” 281.

¹²³ See Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 58; Baumert, 223-4, 312; Rivera, 240-1.

¹²⁴ “The proposition, ‘The husband is the head of his wife’ must be understood as original with the author of Ephesians. In consequences, it has to be explained by the context of Ephesians in which it is found, and not by contemporary or later prejudices in favor of, or in opposition to, a special responsibility entrusted to the husband for his wife. The logical structure of Eph 5:23 shows that both the fact and the modality of a husband’s headship is totally determined . . . above all by the event and mode of Christ’s headship.” Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 618. “Paul never speaks of the husband’s headship except in a context where he also mentions Christ’s headship”, Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 59.

into sacrificial self-giving.¹²⁵ Contrary to our post-Enlightenment attitude regarding power, headship “is not a power base, but a particular way of being a disciple, and the husband’s way of being subordinate to the wife.”¹²⁶

How does the husband, as head, subordinate himself to his wife? He does so by his love for her.¹²⁷ The verb that Paul uses is *ἀγαπάτε*, the same word that stands at the center of the great hymn to love in 1 Cor 13. This is a love that is total and self-less. As Stauffer notes: “It stands under the sign of the cross. It is a readiness for service and sacrifice, for forgiveness and consideration, for help and sympathy, for lifting up the fallen and restoring the broken, in a fellowship which owes its very existence to the mercy of God and the sacrificial death of Christ.”¹²⁸ This is a love centered, then, not so much on feelings (though they are not excluded) as on actions.

As the passage continues, Paul becomes even more explicit in explaining the nature of this love. As if drawing out the suspense, he first commands husbands to love their wives. Then he tells them to love *as* Christ loves the church. Finally, he makes clear

¹²⁵ See Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 619, also 609-610. Other scholars also see in this text a clear call to mutual subordination, for example, Ashley, *Justice in the Church*, 46-52; Sampley 116-17; F.W. Beare, *Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol 1, 717-719; Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 59. A notable exception is Clark’s *Man and Woman in Christ*, 72-87, esp. 74-76. Clark objects to the idea of mutual subordination in Eph 5 due to contextual and philological reasons, plus the confusion between service and subordination.

¹²⁶ Martin, *The Feminist Question*, 399. I will return in Chapter 3 to this notion of power and authority.

¹²⁷ Kahler notes, “Love always includes ‘subordination’, for it does not want to rule but to serve.” Quoted by Rivera, “Wives, Be Subjected to Your Husbands,” 244.

¹²⁸ Stauffer, “*ἀγαπάω*”, in *TDNT*, I, 51. For a full development of this word, see 45-55. For a very readable and inspiring analysis of *ἀγάπη*, see Erasmo Leiva Merikakis, *Love’s Sacred Order* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 129-163.

how Christ loves the church: by giving himself up for her.¹²⁹ In this last section, Paul employs a word that is recognized as having been used among the early Christians as a technical term for the passion of Christ: *παρέδωκεν*.¹³⁰ This same word is found earlier in Eph 5 (v. 2), where the whole Christian community is told: “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and *gave himself up* for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” It is also the same root word found in Gal 2:20, where Paul writes, “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and *gave himself for me*.” As one contemporary writes, “The reckless lavishness of the lover, which makes him give everything in exchange for love and which brands him as the subject of ridicule and contempt, could never be portrayed more radically than by the suffering Savior in his Passion.”¹³¹

The point, then, should be clear: Paul is using a word clearly associated with the passion of Christ to make explicit exactly how the husband is to love his wife – by genuinely adopting an attitude of sacrificial self-love, even to the point of being willing to die for her.¹³² In Eph 5:25-27, then, Paul is not merely holding Jesus up as a model for the husband. Paul is expecting the husband, as one reborn in Christ through baptism, to

¹²⁹ “Love is defined by Christ’s giving up of self for the good of the church. Jesus alone is the criterion of marital love as mutual commitment/subordination. Love is not defined by a principle, but by the person of Jesus. And it is not Jesus’ power, lordship, or authority that is upheld as the model, but his humility and servanthood. Headship language is turned on its head. Power is redefined as love and self-giving, not as exercising authority over another person.” Toews, 35.

¹³⁰ See N. Perrin, “The Use of (*Para*) *didonai* in Connection with the Passion of Jesus in the New Testament,” in *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 98-99.

¹³¹ Merikakis, *Love’s Sacred Order*, 149.

¹³² See also Büchsel, “*παραδίδομι*”, in *TDNT*, II, 170.

participate in the life of Christ, to make his own the actions and attitudes of the Lord.¹³³

There is quite simply no way that any one can argue that these actions and attitudes are oppressive, domineering, offensive, or not in keeping with the dignity of the other person(s) involved.

Eph 5:23 holds out to the husband a model of headship which is to be expressed by his taking the lead, the initiative, in being a servant to his wife, just as Christ took the lead and poured out his life in service. His life, including his willingness to lay down his very life for her, is to be a making present of the life and love of Christ for her. His wife has a claim upon his whole attention. “A man unwilling to find this treasure, to pay this price and run this risk ... had better not marry.”¹³⁴ It is only in response to this love that the wife is invited to freely place herself at the disposal of her husband. As Barth says, “When a husband loves his wife with a love inspired by Christ’s love and (however feebly) resembling it, she would be a fool to prefer to seek autonomy apart from him, sufficiency in herself, or a dominant position over him...Instead of bringing him under control, she will be overwhelmed by his love.”¹³⁵ Kottackal adds, “The love here described is such as to make it a delight for the wife to subject herself to such a loving husband.”¹³⁶

¹³³ For more on this notion of participation, see Francis Martin, “Historical Criticism and the New Testament Teaching on the Imitation of Christ,” *Anthropotes* 6 (1990): 261-287.

¹³⁴ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 704.

¹³⁵ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 649-50.

¹³⁶ J. Kottackal, “Pauline Teaching on Marriage,” *BibleBhashyam* 3 (1977), 216.

*Conclusion: "A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing"*¹³⁷

In this chapter I have argued that, contrary to modern reactions against this passage, Eph 5:21-33 is hardly the adoption of its surrounding culture's worldview. Instead of restating the patriarchal image of the household and marriage, Ephesians sets forth the Christian home built on the foundation of an entirely new model: Christ and his sacrificial self-gift for his bride, the church. The husband, to whom three-fourths of the passage is addressed, is told that he is head of his wife. However, his role as head exists *only* in the manner that Christ is head of the church. Consequently, Paul makes clear that the husband, as a head like Christ, must love his wife. This headship is to be exercised by taking the initiative and leading the wife into sacrificial self-giving, just as Christ did, even to the point of truly dying for her. In response to this, the wife is invited to freely choose, as a person equal in dignity and respect, to place herself at her husband's disposal. With the church as her model, the wife is invited to respond as Christ's bride does: with joyful gratitude for all that has been done for her. This passage, then, which at first glance seems so threatening, is in fact, so liberating. As Barth explains:

This chapter belongs among the outstanding literary documents that provide a charter of liberty and responsibility to both partners in marriage, based upon the dignity, peace, and unity given to them by God through Jesus Christ. Eph 5 intends to help all men, especially all couples, to live together in peace. It frees them from enslavement to powers, traditions, ideals, patterns, and above all from the temptation to seek a solution to their problems in a dualistic ontology, a tyrannic hierarchy, or an equalitarian competition. It liberates them to experience the triumph of unselfish love and voluntary mutual help.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ This expression is borrowed from Miletic, see, "*One Flesh*", 118.

¹³⁸ Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 753.

While it is true that Paul uses different words to describe the attitudes necessary in a husband and wife, I agree with Fennema that there is no “real qualitative difference. Christian self-giving love consists of exactly the same kind of concern for others and devotion to the marriage partner that was required of wives.”¹³⁹ Witherington adds:

If it is right to see Eph 5.21 as an announcement of the theme that follows in vv.22-33, then we can see that husband and wife are called to a mutual self-giving that is to be total and rules out the idea that one member is superior to the other. It does not preclude the husband’s headship or the wife’s submission, but it does so redefine those roles that the husband becomes the chief servant, like Christ and the wife an example of one who responds to her serving lover with loving submission as the Church does in relation to Christ.¹⁴⁰

Thus, it can be safely said that the text itself does indeed entail the idea of the mutual submission of husband and wife, and that John Paul II’s teaching on this matter is firmly rooted in the revealed Word of God.

¹³⁹ Fennema, “Unity in Marriage,” 65.

¹⁴⁰ Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 74.

Chapter Two

Introduction

In the first chapter, I began with the text that can be considered the apex of all Christian teaching on marriage: Eph 5:21-33. I started here because it is in his discussion of Eph in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* that Pope John Paul II writes that *all* subordination in marriage must be understood in the sense of a *mutual* subordination.¹⁴¹ At this point, however, it is necessary to go back, literally, to “the beginning”: the creation of man and woman as revealed in Gen 1:27 and 2:18-25. It is necessary to do this because that revelation is foundational for a theological and anthropological understanding of man, woman, and the relationship that is to be theirs in marriage.¹⁴²

Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this work to give an exhaustive analysis of the riches that can be mined from the two accounts of creation. Rather, my intent is to focus only on those elements that will help to provide a foundation upon which the call to be mutually subordinate in marriage is built. My focus, then, will be two-fold: 1) how both man and woman are created *in the image and likeness of God*, without either one being in any way superior or inferior to the other, and, 2), how both man and woman stand *in need of the other*.

¹⁴¹ See *MD*, 24.

¹⁴² See *TB*, 86-90, hereafter *TB*; *MD*, 6.

The chapter will proceed in the following manner. After briefly looking at the two stories of creation, I will examine the philosophical insights of four contemporary thinkers: John Paul II, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Angelo Scola, and Prudence Allen. Each of these addresses in his or her own way how man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God. Each also makes a helpful contribution to our understanding of the absolute equality that exists between the human person as it is “incarnated” in both the male person and the female person.¹⁴³ Finally, each thinker makes a helpful contribution to our understanding of how the male person and the female person are different. Through the use of categories like “the unity of the two”, “dual unity”, “asymmetrical reciprocity”, and “integral sex complementarity”, these thinkers attempt to render the scriptural revelation more intelligible and accessible.¹⁴⁴

“In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”

Pope John Paul II has made it emphatically clear that in trying to understand marriage according to the design of the Creator we must return to “the beginning.”¹⁴⁵ The Pharisees came to Jesus with questions regarding marriage and divorce (cf. Mt 19). Jesus’ answer was to point them back to the creation of man and woman and God’s original intent for the matrimonial covenant, as revealed in Gen 1:27 and 2:18-25. Modern man,

¹⁴³ “Let us recall the passage of Genesis 2:23: ‘Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.’” In the light of this text, we understand that knowledge of man passes through masculinity and femininity. These are, as it were, two ‘incarnations’ of the same metaphysical solitude before God and the world. They are two ways of ‘being a body’ and at the same time a man, which complete each other. They are two complementary dimensions of self-consciousness and self-determination and, at the same time, two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body.” *TB*, 48.

¹⁴⁴ Also very helpful for furthering an understanding of the similarities and differences between men and women is the collection of essays in *Women: A Compendium*, ed. Helmut Moll (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

¹⁴⁵ See *TB*, 86-87.

too, has many questions regarding marriage, and how it is to be lived and understood. Since the writing of *Mulieris dignitatem*, one of those questions has to do with the papal teaching regarding the mutually subordinate relationship that is to exist between husband and wife. The Holy Father seems keen on showing us that Jesus' answer is no less relevant for us today than it was for the Pharisees.

Thus, to understand more profoundly the anthropological and theological roots of the mutual subordination of husband and wife, we could say that Christ “orders [us] to return, in a way, to the threshold of [our] theological history! He orders [us] to put [ourselves] at the border between original innocence, happiness, and the inheritance of the first fall.”¹⁴⁶ By doing so, does the Lord not show us that the path to understanding lies in regaining the dignity that was present in the beginning?¹⁴⁷ Certainly, in returning to “the beginning”, we are aware that what was present in Eden before the fall has been disfigured. As John Paul II writes, “An insuperable barrier divides us from what man then was as male and female, by means of the gift of grace united with the mystery of creation, and from what they both were for each other, as a mutual gift. *Yet we try to understand* that state of original innocence in its connection with man’s historical state after original sin: ‘*status naturae lapsae simul et redemptae.*’”¹⁴⁸ Thus, in trying to understand God’s plan for the husband-wife relationship, it is necessary to try to understand how that relationship originally existed. And, though this relationship is now marred by sin, we still have access to it in revelation. This is most important, because the

¹⁴⁶ *TB*, 89.

¹⁴⁷ See *TB*, 89.

¹⁴⁸ *TB*, 73, italics mine.

redemption of Jesus Christ makes it genuinely possible to overcome the tragedy of sin and to live marriage again as it was intended.¹⁴⁹

It is well worth mentioning that the Pope's thought on the relationship between men and women is "quite innovative, even revolutionary in terms of the history of Christian thought or theology."¹⁵⁰ Biblically speaking, there are a number of possible starting points for addressing this issue. But for the Holy Father, *the most fundamental truth* we learn in "the beginning" is that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). In his mind, then, Gen 1:27, and the revelation that God created man male and female, "constitutes the immutable *basis of all Christian anthropology*."¹⁵¹ It constitutes, as well, "the deepest theological aspect of all that can be said about man."¹⁵² To understand the dignity that belongs equally to man and woman, and that is at the heart of the call to be mutually subordinate, it is necessary to reflect briefly on of what being "in the image of God" consists.

¹⁴⁹ With the notable difference that historical man lives with the constant battle of concupiscence and the inclination to sin and selfishness.

¹⁵⁰ Lawrence B. Porter, "Gender in Theology: The Example of John Paul II's *Mulieris dignitatem*," *Gregorianum* 77, 1 (1996): 106. In the same article, Porter cites the thought of Richard Viladesau, who writes regarding the Pope's emphasis on Gen 1:27, "It is indeed a theologically ground-breaking statement on the dignity and complete equality of women, based on a reading of scriptural tradition in light of a philosophy of personalism." See "Could Jesus Have Ordained Women?" in *Thought* 67 (1992), 6.

¹⁵¹ *MD*, 6. See also, Karol Wojtyła, "The Family as a Community of Persons," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 317.

¹⁵² *MD*, 6.

Gen 1:26-28

²⁶And Elohim said: “Let us make *ādām* in our image, as our likeness, that they may rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the heavens, and the tame beasts, and all the creeping things on the earth.” ²⁷And Elohim created the *ādām* in his image: in the image of Elohim he created him/it, male and female he created them. ²⁸And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said to them: Be fruitful, be many, and fill the earth and subjugate it, and rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the heavens, and all the living things creeping on the earth. ¹⁵³

It has been said that more theological reflection has been done on this text than on any other in the Bible.¹⁵⁴ With that in mind, I wish here to touch only on some of the most important aspects of this passage as it pertains to the topic at hand.¹⁵⁵ Two things are of note for my purposes: 1) *ādām* is created in the image of God, and, 2) *ādām* exists as male and female.

It is worth noting at the outset how different this story is from those stories of creation circulating amongst Israel’s neighbors. In fact, as Martin writes, “There is nothing resembling this attention to the reality of man and woman in creation and the importance of their relationship in any of the contiguous material that has come down to us.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ As translated by Francis Martin, “Male and Female He Created Them: A Summary of the Teaching of Genesis Chapter One,” *Communio* 20 (1993), 244.

¹⁵⁴ See “Male and Female He Created Them,” 245. Among the many references that could be listed, see Phyllis Bird, “Male and Female He Created Them: Gen 1:27b in the Context of the P Account of Creation,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981): 129-59; Gunnlaugur A. Jonsson, *The Image of God. Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series, 26 (Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988); Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco: Word Books, 1987); Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

¹⁵⁵ In what follows I am drawing heavily upon the survey of thought given by Martin in “Male and Female He Created Them”, 243-252.

¹⁵⁶ “Male and Female He Created Them,” 254.

Crucial for an adequate understanding of this text is the word “image.” The Hebrew word *selem* (“image”) occurs seventeen times in the Old Testament. The majority of occurrences refer to a physical image, like an idol. Four times it is used to refer to the relation that exists between *ādām* and God.¹⁵⁷ Once it is used to describe the relation between Adam and his son, Seth (Gen 5:3). The basic notion behind the word *selem* is not so much that the image bears a physical resemblance to the thing it represents, but that the image makes present the power of what – or who – is imaged. As Von Rad notes: “Just as the great worldly kings erect a likeness of themselves, in provinces of their realm where they do not personally come and go, as a sign of their sovereign claim to authority – so man, placed on earth in his likeness to God...is enjoined to preserve and enforce God’s claim to sovereignty on earth.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, *ādām*, as the image of God, “is to be God’s vice regent,” “the royal representative of God himself, embodying and exercising God’s own authority in regard to the earth and all that lives on it.”¹⁵⁹ In addition to being God’s “royal representative,” *ādām* stands out from among the rest of the living creatures in that he alone is addressed directly by God, alone shares in God’s rest and worship, and is alone avenged by God himself for the shedding of his blood.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Gen 1:26, 27 (two times); 9:6.

¹⁵⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose* [The First Book of Moses], ATD 2/4 (Göttingen, 1972), 37, as cited by Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 199.

¹⁵⁹ Martin, “Male and Female He Created Them,” 246, 247. This authority of *ādām*, however, is “not one of military dominance, but one in which humankind exercises toward creation that righteousness and care which characterizes God’s kingship over the whole universe” (256).

¹⁶⁰ See Martin, “Male and Female He Created Them,” 254.

In discussing humanity as created in the image of God, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* adds the following distinctive characteristics of *ādām*: of all visible creatures man alone is able to know and to love his Creator; man is the only creature willed by God for its own sake; and man alone is called to share in God’s own divine life.¹⁶¹ To be in God’s image means to be a person,¹⁶² “capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession, and of freely giving himself and entering into a communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.”¹⁶³ Walter Kasper, attempting to summarize the biblical teaching on man and woman in the image of God, writes, “What is meant is the whole human person in body and soul, the whole person in relation to God, the human being as a responsive covenant partner for God. The concept

¹⁶¹ See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), no. 356.

¹⁶² I do not here wish to get into a lengthy discussion of “person.” Among the many helpful sources, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, “On the Concept of Person,” trans. Peter Verhalen, *Communio* 13 (1986): 18-26; Czesław Bartnik, “‘The Person’ in the Holy Trinity,” trans. Norbert Karava, *Collectanea Theologica* 53 (1983): 17-30; W. Norris Clarke, “Person, Being and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 601-618; *ibid.*, “Response to David Schindler’s Comments,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 593-598; Joseph Ratzinger, “Retrieving the Tradition: The Notion of Person in Theology,” trans. Michael Waldstein, *Communio* 17 (1990): 439-454; David Schindler, “Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 580-592; Kenneth L. Schmitz, “The Geography of the Human Person,” *Communio* 13 (1986): 27-46; see also the articles on “Person” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), 1207-1225. For a concise summary of John Paul II’s thought on “person”, see Antoine E. Nachez, O.S.B., *The Mystery of the Trinity in the Theological Thought of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 11-54.

¹⁶³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 357. For more on man as “the image of God”, see nos. 1701-1715. See also The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 12, in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, gen. ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport: Costello Publishing Inc., 1975). Besides *Mulieris dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II also addresses man as the image of God in the Encyclical Letter *Dominum et vivificantem*, 34. For some of his earlier thoughts on these matters, see the essays “On the Dignity of the Human Person,” “The Personal Structure of Self-Determinism,” “Participation or Alienation?” “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in the Human Being,” and “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*.

of the image of God thus describes human beings as creatures made for dialogue, created by God and for God.”¹⁶⁴

Ādām, however, and this is most important, exists as “male and female.”¹⁶⁵ The human person was not created androgynous, as some myths held.¹⁶⁶ Instead, “Humanity only exists in the ‘dual version’ of man and woman.”¹⁶⁷ This difference is something “that precedes all other social realities and is willed by God.”¹⁶⁸ As Pope John Paul II writes, “The creative act of God takes place according to a precise plan”,¹⁶⁹ namely, that “the human being should always and only exist as a woman or a man.”¹⁷⁰ So, then, in the Priestly account of creation, “The first function...of the description of *ādām* as male and female is to place sexual differentiation and sexuality itself within a world created by God and seen by him as good...It is one expression of the way in which humans image God.”¹⁷¹ One of the ways this *ādām*, as male and female, images God refers certainly to how *ādām* creates in its own image through generation (Gen 5:3). Thus, Martin notes:

¹⁶⁴ “The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology,” trans. John Seward, in *Women: A Compendium*, 54-55.

¹⁶⁵ In Hebrew, *zākār* and *n^eqēbā*, which refer directly to the physical differences between the sexes. For more, see “*zākār*,” R. E. Clements, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 82-87; “*n^eqēbā*,” J. Scharbert, *TDOT*, Vol. IX, 551-553.

¹⁶⁶ See Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13 (1974): 165-208.

¹⁶⁷ Kasper, “The Position of Woman,” 55.

¹⁶⁸ Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?* 200.

¹⁶⁹ *Letter to Women* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1995), 7.

¹⁷⁰ *MD*, 1.

¹⁷¹ Martin, “Male and Female He Created Them,” 254.

But there is more. Male and female are described as making up the humanity that images God before they are blessed and made fruitful...Deeper than the transmission of life...is the fact that male and female are equal in their imaging of God. Neither sex is the image of God to the detriment of the other: it is humanity as male and female which embodies something of God in this world.¹⁷²

My point in looking, albeit very briefly, at Gen 1:26-28 has been to highlight the ultimate anthropological ground for the mutual subordination of husband and wife in marriage: both man and woman are created in the image of God, and, thus, both are worthy of utmost respect and indeed reverence. As the Holy Father writes,

This concise passage contains the fundamental anthropological truths: man is the high point of the whole order of creation in the visible world; the human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; *both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree*, both are created *in God's image*... The Creator entrusts dominion over the earth to the human race, to all persons, to all men and women, who derive their dignity and vocation from the common "beginning."¹⁷³

The equality of man and woman, then, shines forth clearly in the Priestly account of creation. It is, however, perhaps not as readily apparent in the second, and Yahwist, account of creation, as revealed in Gen 2:18-25. It is to that story that I wish to now turn.

¹⁷² "Male and Female He Created Them," 254-55. Surely, some Christian authors have at times argued that only man, i.e. the male person, is fully in the image of God. Most notable among these is St. Augustine. Augustine's thought, however, was complex and full of contradictions. For a full overview of Augustine's ideas on woman as the image of God, see Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. – 1250 A.D.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 221-222.

¹⁷³ *MD*, 6.

Gen 2:18-25

¹⁸Then Yhwh God said: It is not good, the man's being alone, let me make for him a helper matching him. ¹⁹Then Yhwh God fashioned out of the soil all the beasts of the field, and all the birds of the heavens, and He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called any living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all the tame animals, to all the birds of the heavens, and all the beasts of the field, but for the man there was found no helper matching him.¹⁷⁴ ²¹The Yhwh God made a deep sleep come upon the man and he slumbered, and He took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²Yhwh God built up the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman and He led her to the man. ²³Then the man said: This at last is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh. This one shall be called woman for from man was this one taken. ²⁴For this reason a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh. ²⁵They were both naked, the man and his wife, but they felt no shame with one another.¹⁷⁵

Commenting upon this second account of creation in *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 6,

Pope John Paul II writes

The second description of the creation of man...makes use of different language to express the truth about the creation of man, and especially of woman. In a sense the language is less precise, and, one might say, more descriptive and metaphorical, closer to the language of the myths known at the time. Nevertheless, we find no essential contradiction between the two texts. The text of Gen 2:18-25 helps us to understand better what we find in the concise passage of Gen 1:27-28. At the same time, if it is read together with the latter, it helps us to understand even more profoundly the fundamental truth which it contains concerning man created as man and woman in the image and likeness of God.

¹⁷⁴ The idea expressed in the Hebrew by the word *kēnegdô* (“matching him”) is that this “helper” must be of the same kind that the man is. See Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 201; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. III: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans., Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 284-287.

¹⁷⁵ As translated by Francis Martin in an unpublished manuscript on the biblical theology of marriage and family in the Old Testament.

What exactly is it about this passage that can help us “understand even more profoundly the fundamental truth” about man, male and female, as being in the image of God? The answer to this question seems to come in accurately understanding a word that is frequently misunderstood: “helper.”¹⁷⁶

In his commentary *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, St. Augustine came to the disconcerting conclusion that the only possible way the woman could be a helper for the man was by bearing children.¹⁷⁷ Such a conclusion hardly resonates with the statement made above by the Holy Father. Thankfully, Augustine has not had the last word on the matter, and our understanding of this passage continues to increase.

It is important to recall that up until Gen 2:18 there has been a constant refrain uttered by God upon looking at his creation: “It is good.” In fact, this refrain has been uttered seven times before Gen 2:18. But then, for the first time, God changes his tone and says: “It is not good.”

¹⁷⁶ The Hebrew is ‘ēzer. This noun is found nineteen times in the Old Testament –fifteen of those occurrences refer to *divine* aid. See Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 201, 203; Jean-Louis Ska, “‘Je vais lui faire un allié qui soit son homologue’ (Gen 2,18). A propos du terme ‘ezer-aide,’” *Biblica* 65 (1984): 233-238; Marie de Merode, “‘Une aide qui lui corresponde.’ L’exégèse de Gen 2,18-24 dans les écrits de l’Ancien Testament, du judaïsme et du Nouveau Testament,” *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 8 (1977): 329-352.

¹⁷⁷ “Now, if the woman was not made for the man to be his helper in begetting children, in what was she to help him? She was not to till the earth with him, for there was not yet any toil to make help necessary. If there were any such need, a male helper would be better, and the same could be said of the comfort of another’s presence if Adam were perhaps weary of solitude. How much more agreeably could two male friends, rather than a man and a woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together!...Consequently, I do not see in what sense the woman was made as a helper for the man if not for the sake of bearing children”, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, SJ, Vol II, ACW 42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 75. For more see Elizabeth Clark, “‘Adam’s Only Companion’: Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21 (1986): 139-162.

What is not good is the fact that the man is alone. In order, then, for this creation to be “good” something further must happen. That something further is the creation of woman by God – a creation that is no less a creative thought of God than was the creation of man.¹⁷⁸ Von Balthasar writes, “This state of affairs cannot be remedied by man on his own; the action of Adam’s (‘man’s’) Creator is required if man is to be complete.”¹⁷⁹ Pope John Paul II adds, “In the second account of creation, through the symbolism of the creation of woman from man’s rib, Scripture stresses that humanity is not complete until woman is created.”¹⁸⁰ In this stressing, Scripture is again revealing truth in a way that is totally foreign to the Israelite neighbors. “In this estimation of the significance of woman, or of being human as an associatedness of man and woman, Genesis 2 is unique among the myths from the whole Near East that deal with the creation of man.”¹⁸¹

God is revealing in Gen 2:18-25 that humanity is only “complete” upon the arrival of a “helper.” Despite how it may initially appear to some listeners, and despite how some, like Augustine, have interpreted it, this notion of woman as “helper” has a meaning and implication that is far from disparaging. Indeed, it

should not be interpreted as meaning that the woman is man’s servant – “helper” is not the equivalent of “servant”; the psalmist says to God: “You are my help” (Ps 70:5; cf. Ps 115:9, 10, 11; Ps 118:7; Ps 146:5); rather the whole statement means that woman is able to collaborate with man because she complements him perfectly. Woman is another kind of “ego” in their common humanity, which consists of male and female in perfectly equal dignity.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ See Kasper, “The Position of Woman,” 57-58.

¹⁷⁹ *Theo-Drama*, III, 285.

¹⁸⁰ Pope John Paul II, General Audience, Nov. 24, 1999, as reported in the English language edition of *L’Osservatore Romano*, N. 48, 1 December, 1999, hereafter General Audience Nov 24, 1999.

¹⁸¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 316, as cited in Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 203.

¹⁸² Pope John Paul II, General Audience Nov. 24, 1999.

In his 1995 *Letter to Women*, the Holy Father adds, “The creation of woman is thus marked, from the outset, by *the principle of help*: a help which is not one-sided but *mutual*. Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are *complementary*. Womanhood expresses the ‘human’ as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way.”¹⁸³ This complementarity, however, is not something that is merely physical or psychological, but ontological.¹⁸⁴ As the Holy Father observes, “It is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds realization.”¹⁸⁵ This story of creation, then, reveals that man, for some reason, needs an “other”, or more accurately, another “I.” As Martin succinctly says, “He needs ‘help’ to be human.”¹⁸⁶

The “help” that man is primarily in need of is not simply for the task of procreation, as Augustine thought, nor is it for any *doing*, like tilling the soil or managing the earth – though certainly for these help is either necessary (procreation) or most welcome (tilling the soil). Rather, the “help” that man is primarily in need of is on the level of *being*. What Gen 2:18-25 is revealing, among other things, is that humanity is made for relationship. In more theologically precise terms, humanity is made for *communio*. *Communio* comes from the combination of two Latin words: *com* (or *cum*) and *unus*. This word is a paradox, as Mary Rousseau explains:

¹⁸³ Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 7.

¹⁸⁴ For more on the complementarity of man and woman, see William E. May, “Marriage and the Complementarity of Male and Female,” *Anthropotes: Rivista sulla persona e la famiglia* 8 (1992): 41-60.

¹⁸⁵ *Letter to Women*, 7.

¹⁸⁶ Francis Martin, unpublished manuscript on the biblical theology of marriage and family in the Old Testament.

The first [word] *com* (meaning “together,” or “with”) requires some multiplicity. A *communio* must have at least two members. But the second root, *unus* (the number one), requires unity, the opposite of multiplicity. The word, then, like the reality itself, seems anomalous – a multitude that is one, a unity that is multiple. A *communio* is, indeed, a “many turned into one without ceasing to be many.”¹⁸⁷

In his essay “The Family as a Community of Persons,”¹⁸⁸ Wojtyla comments further upon *communio*. He notes that etymologically the word may refer to 1) “the confirmation and reinforcement that is a result of the unity and bond of a group of people when they exist and act together”, or, 2) “the confirmation and reinforcement – the mutual affirmation – that is a property of the bond by which those people are united.”¹⁸⁹ The first meaning defines more “the “effects of a certain manner or mode of being and acting”, whereas the second meaning defines “that mode of being and acting itself.” He emphasizes that *communio* is not equal to “community.” Instead, it is a mode of being that leads to the personal fulfillment of each person involved.¹⁹⁰

The concept of *communio*...does not refer just to something in common, to community as a certain effect of or even expression of the being and acting of persons. It refers rather to the very mode of being and acting of those persons, which is a *mode of being and acting in mutual relation to one another* (not just “in common” with one another) *such that through this being and acting they mutually affirm one another as persons.*¹⁹¹

So, then, in addition to saying that man is created in the image of God in that he is rational, free, and self-possessed, we can say that man is in the image of God in that he is

¹⁸⁷ Mary Rousseau, “Pope John Paul II’s *Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women*: The Call to *Communio*,” *Communio* 16 (1989): 212-232, 215.

¹⁸⁸ In *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 315-327.

¹⁸⁹ *Person and Community*, 320.

¹⁹⁰ See *ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 321. Also helpful is Wojtyla’s “Participation or Alienation?” in *Person and Community*, 197-207. For more on the emphasis that Wojtyla placed upon the notion of *communio* see, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of Vatican II*, trans P.S. Falla (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 133-138.

relational.¹⁹² The ultimate relationship man can have is with God himself. Man “receives as a gift a special ‘*image and likeness*’ to God. This means not only rationality and freedom as constitutive properties of human nature, but also, from the very beginning, the capacity of having a *personal relationship* with God, as ‘I’ and ‘you’, and therefore the *capacity of having a covenant*, which will take place in God’s salvific communication with man.”¹⁹³ But this is in no way meant to belittle the relationships that man has with other men, and, in a significant way, the relationship that exists between man and woman. “Man cannot exist ‘alone’...he can exist only as a ‘unity of the two’, and therefore *in relation to another human person*. It is a question here of a mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man. Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other ‘I’.”¹⁹⁴ The woman, then, is the man’s “helper” in that he cannot reach this *communio* without her, and, thus, cannot find fulfillment without her.¹⁹⁵

Every person, then, is created for this *communio*, and the only way to reach it is by love – a special kind of love. As Rousseau again explains, “Such love is characterized

¹⁹² This is at the heart of Ratzinger’s critique of Boethius’ definition of “person” as *rationalis naturae individua substantia* in “Retrieving the Tradition.” See also his *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 127-132.

¹⁹³ Pope John Paul II Encyclical Letter *Dominum et vivificantem* (Sherbrooke: Les Éditions Paulines, 1986), 34.

¹⁹⁴ *MD*, 7; see also January 9, 1980.

¹⁹⁵ Rousseau reiterates the Pope’s point regarding woman as “helper.” “In the Adam and Eve story, Eve is Adam’s helpmate. But her status is in no way servile. She is his helpmate precisely in the task of achieving *communio*, a task that requires strict reciprocity between them. Eve is created precisely because of Adam’s superiority over all other creatures and his inability to find among them a helpmate, one like himself. Eve is like him, then, in being a person. Personhood is the element of sameness in the sexual analogy. And yet, she is different from him – as different as anyone might be and still be a human person. She is his sexual opposite.” “The Call to *Communio*,” 222.

by its motivation: it is wishing well to a beloved for the beloved's, not the lover's, sake.”

It is “to give one's very self to the beloved.”¹⁹⁶

However, not only is every person created *for* this *communio*, every person can *only find fulfillment* by entering into this *communio*. Love alone fulfills the human person, and to love is to give, and “‘to give’ means ‘to become a sincere gift’ in the most complete and radical way.”¹⁹⁷ “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend (Jn 15:13). As Mary Rousseau notes, “Contrary to what we expect, self-giving is the way to self-fulfillment. The love by which one person puts his very self at the service of another, for that other's sake, is the bond that unites them.”¹⁹⁸

This love and communion is “a mirror” of the Trinitarian communion of love that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁹ Despite all of our modern tendencies to think that we can find fulfillment and satisfaction in getting, revelation tells

¹⁹⁶ Rousseau, “The Call to *Communio*,” 215. See also, Wojtyla, “The Family as a Community of Persons,” 322.

¹⁹⁷ *MD*, 25. The Holy Father lists a growing awareness of the need to exist for others among other positive signs of our times. “A deeper understanding of the human person in terms of his ‘being for others’ in interpersonal communion. Today, to think of the person in his self-giving dimension is becoming a matter of principle.” General Audience Nov. 24, 1999. A more pessimistic view is expressed by Donald DeMarco, who thinks that there is a growing trend, especially in the United States, and particularly evident in the attitude toward abortion, towards a much more selfish conception of human existence. See “The Reality of Motherhood,” *The Human Life Review* 26 (2000): 47-54.

¹⁹⁸ Rousseau, “The Call to *Communio*,” 215. See also Wojtyla, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determinism,” in *Person and Community*, 187-195, esp. 194; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 28, 1-6; Michele M. Schumacher, “The Prophetic Vocation of Women and the Order of Love,” *Logos* 2 (1999), 146-192, esp. 156-158.

¹⁹⁹ See *MD*, 7. For a closer look at the significance of this in the thought of Wojtyla, see A. Wilder, O.P., “Community of Persons in the Thought of Karol Wojtyla,” *Angelicum* 56 (1979): 211-244.

us that God's existence is one of "reckless" self-giving among the three divine Persons.²⁰⁰

And the human person is created in *that* image.

The fact, then, that humanity exists as male and female "*shows that the creation of man* is also marked by a certain likeness to the divine communion (*'communio'*). This likeness is a quality of the personal being of both man and woman."²⁰¹ This is the truth that is being communicated in The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* 24, in a passage that is quoted so often by Pope John Paul II:

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus, when praying to the Father "that they may all be one...even as we are one" (Jn. 17:21-22), has opened up new horizons closed to human reason by implying that there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the sons of God in truth and love. It follows, then, that if man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake, man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself.

The significance of these words, according to John Paul II, is that they contain

a summary of the whole truth about man and woman – a truth that is already outlined in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, and which is the structural basis of biblical and Christian anthropology...Being a person means striving towards self-realization...which can only be achieved "*through a sincere gift of self.*" The model for this interpretation of the person is God himself as Trinity, as a communion of Persons. To say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist "for" others, to become a gift.²⁰²

And again the Pope writes

²⁰⁰ For more on this "divine recklessness" within the Trinity, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994): 319-332.

²⁰¹ *MD*, 7.

²⁰² *MD*, 7. In *Familiaris consortio*, Pope John Paul II writes: "God created man in his own image and likeness: calling him to existence *through love*, he called him at the same time *for love*. God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (11).

Today, it is more necessary than ever to present the biblical anthropology of relationality, which helps us genuinely understand the human being's identity in his relationship to others, particularly between man and woman. In the human person considered in his "relationality", we find a vestige of God's own mystery revealed in Christ as a substantial unity in the communion of three divine Persons. In the light of this mystery it is easy to understand the statement of *Gaudium et spes* [24]...The difference between man and woman calls for interpersonal communion.²⁰³

Summary

At this point I wish to sum up what has been said thus far, before moving on to the thoughts of John Paul II, Balthasar, Scola, and Allen. I have looked briefly at the two stories of creation as they have been revealed to us in Gen 1:26-28 and 2:18-25. Each of these stories is important for helping us to understand the ultimate foundations, anthropological and theological, upon which the teaching that husbands and wives should be – indeed *must be* – mutually subordinate.

From the first creation story, we glean, among other things, the truth that *both man and woman equally share the divine image*. Thus, there can be no reason why either sex could think that it is in any way superior to the other. There is, before God who created us all, an essential equality, though not interchangeability. From the second story of creation, we glean, among other things, the truth that *the human person is made for relation* – both with God and with other human persons.

This emphasis on relationality explains, then, that both the husband and the wife can only fulfill themselves by making a sincere gift of self to the other. Indeed, the gift of

²⁰³ John Paul II, General Audience Nov. 24, 1999. See also Wojtyla, "The Family as a Community of Persons," 322-325.

self lies at the heart of the marriage covenant.²⁰⁴ In saying that all subordination within marriage must be understood as a mutual subordination between husband and wife, then, we affirm that the Pope is not so much making a moral statement as he is stating that there is *an ontological need* for such a relationship; for without it, neither person could ever reach perfection.²⁰⁵ This sincere gift can be nothing less than a total gift, one that holds nothing back and that seeks the good of the other person. In the words of Eph 5:21-33, the husband does this by “handing himself over” for his wife, and the wife does this by freely placing herself under her husband’s loving care. Without such self-giving love, it is impossible that a marriage could be considered a *Christian* marriage.²⁰⁶

“Dual Unity” and John Paul II’s “The Unity of the Two”

In this section, I wish to look at two similar expressions used by two different men: Hans Urs von Balthasar and Pope John Paul II. These two expressions – “dual unity” and “the unity of the two” – can help to shed further light on man and woman as created in the image and likeness of God and made for communion. Because they are so similar in their ideas, I think it best to treat them together in one section. There will be some overlap, perhaps, between their thought, but that might prove useful, especially since the expressions are not ones that tend to be familiar to most of us. “Dual unity” is presented quite succinctly and thus will not require much space. That is not quite the case

²⁰⁴ See Wojtyła, “The Family as a Community of Persons,” 323.

²⁰⁵ By this I do not in any way wish to imply that such behavior is selfish, as if “I give of myself *so that* I may be fulfilled.” The *priority* has to be on loving the other, but one of the consequences of this will be my own fulfillment. For more on this thought, see David Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 108, n.22., 122-126.

²⁰⁶ “Marriage corresponds to the vocation of Christians only when it reflects the love which Christ the Bridegroom gives to the Church his Bride, and which the Church...attempts to return to Christ.” *TB*, 312.

for “the unity of the two.” Thus, after stopping only to define “dual unity” I will move on to the thought of the Holy Father, especially as it is outlined in his *Letter to Women*, his Wednesday audiences on “the theology of the body”, and *Mulieris dignitatem*.

“Dual Unity”

This term, while often associated with Balthasar, actually comes from A. Frank-Duquesne.²⁰⁷ Nonetheless, it is Balthasar who develops it more fully. The term refers to

two distinct but inseparable realities, each fulfilling the other and both ordained to an ultimate unity that we cannot as yet envisage...it is dual, without multiplying the unity by two; it is simply two poles of a single reality, two diverse presences of a single being, two *entia* in a single *esse*, one existence in two lives; but by no means two different fragments of a whole, to be fitted together like a puzzle.²⁰⁸

The only further points I wish to add to this succinct definition are Balthasar’s comments that this unity is also made manifest in that both the man and woman are created directly by God – and the woman’s coming from the man’s side is not to indicate that she is something less than he, but rather that they are both of the same “stuff.”²⁰⁹ Even more, the taking of woman from man’s side was a physical image of the origin from the Father’s substance of the eternal Son who shares his nature. As von Balthasar notes, “It was a wound of love that God inflicted on Adam in order to initiate him into the mystery, the lavish self-prodigality, of divine love.”²¹⁰ Their unity is also apparent in that both the man and the woman are dependent on the other one: “neither can be the whole

²⁰⁷ See A. Frank-Duquesne, *Création et Procréation* (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1951).

²⁰⁸ As quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory. II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 365-366.

²⁰⁹ See *Theo-Drama, III*, 285.

²¹⁰ See *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 227-228.

human being on its own; there is always the ‘other’ mode of being human, a way that is not open to its counterpart.”²¹¹

“The Unity of the Two”

In the Holy Father’s *Letter to Women*, while he is reflecting on man and woman created “in the image and likeness of God”, he states that the “most natural relationship” between man and woman is “the unity of the two.”²¹² What does he mean by this? Earlier in the same paragraph he sheds some light on this when he writes that the task of caring for the earth is a task that has been entrusted to both of them, as male and female. In this relationship between the two of them there is “neither static and undifferentiated equality nor...an irreconcilable and inexorably conflictual difference.”

These brief remarks on “the unity of the two” are fleshed out more fully in John Paul II’s Wednesday audiences on “the theology of the body.”²¹³ In these, he speaks of how man, “in the beginning,” existed in a state of “original solitude.”²¹⁴ This “original solitude” has two different meanings. The first meaning comes from the first account of creation and has to do with the fact that man (male and female) is different from the animals, has a unique relationship with God, is created as a person – oriented to a relationship with another person, and expresses himself through his body.²¹⁵

²¹¹ *Theo-Drama, II*, 369. For a full discussion of this idea, see 365-374.

²¹² See *Letter to Women*, 8.

²¹³ See especially *TB*, 246-249, 270-272.

²¹⁴ See *TB*, 35-37.

²¹⁵ See *TB*, 35-37, 40-42, 80-83.

The second meaning of “original solitude” comes from the second account of creation and has to do with the fact that man (the male person) is alone. The man recognizes that he is alone on the basis of his body, for his is a body unlike that of the other creatures. “His body, through which he participates in the visible world, makes him at the same time conscious of being ‘alone’.”²¹⁶ This being “alone” is not good, as we saw above, for alone “man does not completely realize this essence [of being a person]. He realizes it only by existing ‘with someone’ – and even more deeply and completely – by existing ‘for someone.’”²¹⁷

When the man awakens from the deep sleep that God has caused him to fall into and sees the woman, he recognizes that here at last is another like him, because she too has a body like his. As John Paul II notes: “Here is a body that expresses the person”²¹⁸ – and yet this person is different! Balthasar writes, “Here [in their seeing each other for the first time] their equal rank is given even more emphasis: man looks around him and meets with an answering gaze that turns the one-who-sees into the one-who-is-seen.”²¹⁹ The Holy Father adds, “Somatic homogeneity, in spite of the difference in constitution bound up with the sexual difference, is so evident that the man, on waking up from the genetic sleep, expresses it at once, when he says: ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh – she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man’ (Gen 2:23).”²²⁰ Thus, “[f]ollowing the narrative of Genesis, we have seen that the ‘definitive’

²¹⁶ *TB*, 38.

²¹⁷ *TB*, 60.

²¹⁸ *TB*, 61.

²¹⁹ *Theo-Drama, III*, 285.

²²⁰ *TB*, 45.

creation of man consists in the creation of the unity of two beings. Their unity denotes above all the identity of human nature; their duality, on the other hand, manifests what, on the basis of this identity, constitutes the masculinity and femininity of created man.”²²¹

Because the body expresses the person, the Pope writes that it has a nuptial meaning, that is, the body expresses the truth that the human person is oriented to making a sincere gift of self, is made to be in relation, in *communio*.²²² Indeed, “the original and fundamental significance of being a body, as well as being, by reason of the body, male and female...is united to the fact that man is created as a person and called to a life *in communione personarum*.”²²³ And this *communio personarum* is created by the mutual donation of self.²²⁴

The awareness of the nuptial meaning is “the fundamental element of human existence in the world.”²²⁵ In fact, John Paul reasons, when man enters into this *communio personarum*, he becomes more fully the image of God. “The function of the image is to reflect the one who is the model, to reproduce its own prototype. Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion.”²²⁶ Because the body expresses the person, the unity that happens between

²²¹ *TB*, 45.

²²² See *TB* 45-51, 54-57, 60-66, 246-249.

²²³ *TB*, 247.

²²⁴ See *TB* 69-72.

²²⁵ *TB*, 66. The Pope is keen on emphasizing that this nuptial meaning, while marred by sin, *has not been lost*. Indeed, it “remains inscribed in the depths of the human heart”, *TB*, 75.

²²⁶ *TB*, 46.

the man and the woman, when “the two become one flesh” (Gen 2:24), is not merely a communion of bodies, “but also the ‘incarnate’ communion of persons.”²²⁷

It is in *Mulieris dignitatem* that the expression “the unity of the two” is used most frequently – eighteen times in all. Here, in this document, the Pope articulates most succinctly the ways in which there is a fundamental *equality* between man and woman (“unity”), and the ways in which there is, at the same time, a fundamental *difference* (“the two”) – which does not negate the fundamental equality. The *equality* stems from the fact that both man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God, that is, both are rational and free.²²⁸ To both man and woman there is given the task of caring for the earth.²²⁹ Man and woman are both called to live in “a communion of love,” “to exist not only ‘side by side’ or ‘together’, but...*to exist mutually ‘one for the other.’*”²³⁰ In this existing mutually “for” the other, “marriage is the first, and in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call” – though it is not the exclusive dimension.²³¹ Furthermore, neither man nor woman is able to find himself or herself except by making a sincere gift of self.²³² Man and woman are both involved in generating new human life.²³³ And finally, man and woman are both “co-subjects” of existence in the world.²³⁴ The *difference* between man and woman is something that is not as easy to pinpoint, though several general things can be said. There is a “specific diversity and personal originality” that

²²⁷ *TB*, 47.

²²⁸ See *MD*, 7.

²²⁹ See *ibid.*, 6.

²³⁰ See *ibid.*.

²³¹ See *ibid.*, 7.

²³² See *ibid.*.

²³³ See *ibid.*, 8.

²³⁴ See *ibid.*, 14.

belongs to man and to woman.²³⁵ The “personal resources” of woman are different than the “resources” of man.²³⁶ Among the “personal resources” that John Paul II mentions as belonging to woman are: an openness to life,²³⁷ a better ability to listen to the word of God,²³⁸ and a receptivity that is “prophetic.”²³⁹ As for the man, *Mulieris dignitatem* alludes to “resources” like a certain *initiative* in the act of making a loving self-gift.²⁴⁰

Angelo Scola and Asymmetrical Reciprocity

It can be the case with Pope John Paul II that he makes use of a phrase or expression without going on to systematically discuss it. It might be reasonably argued that the expression “the unity of the two” is one of those expressions.²⁴¹ Bishop Angelo Scola has perhaps dedicated more time to this expression, as well as the Holy Father’s overall reflections on man and woman created in the image and likeness of God, than any other person in the Church. In this section, I wish briefly to touch upon Scola’s commentary on this expression of the Pope, as well as to look at his own contribution to this area. That contribution is found in a particular way by the concept of “asymmetrical reciprocity.”

²³⁵ See *ibid.*, 10.

²³⁶ See *ibid.*

²³⁷ See *ibid.*, 18.

²³⁸ See *ibid.*, 19.

²³⁹ See *ibid.*, 29. For a further elaboration of these themes, see Schumacher, “The Prophetic Vocation of Women.”

²⁴⁰ See *MD*, 24, 29. Perhaps because this document is written on the dignity and vocation of *woman* the Pope pays more attention to the distinctiveness of woman than of man. His failure to write more on the distinctiveness of man (the male person) is one critique of his work in general that seems justified. The essays dealing with the equality and differences between the sexes, especially by Lehman, Albrecht, and Kasper in *Women: A Compendium* provide a most helpful complement to the thought of the Pope.

²⁴¹ It might be argued that another place this has occurred is with the expression “domestic Church.”

In trying to expand upon the theme of “dual unity,” or “the unity of the two,” Scola lists four essential features. 1) Man always exists as only male or female, 2) the relationship between man and woman is one of identity and difference, 3) human sexuality is something that, from a strictly theological point of view, belongs to man’s being in the image and likeness of God, and, 4) with the analogy of being, spousal love becomes an image for all types of love.²⁴²

Much of Scola’s thought is directed to the question, “Why God wanted man to exist as male and female?”²⁴³ In one place, he concludes, “The inclusion of sexual difference in the *imago Dei* allows us to speak – under precise conditions to be sure – of a certain analogy between the relation of man and woman and Trinitarian relations. *Communio* is an essential dimension of man is part of his being in the image of God.”²⁴⁴ It is on the basis of this that Scola concludes that spousal love is the *analogatum princeps* of every type of love.²⁴⁵ Thus, human sexuality is not something accidental, or “derivative”; it is, rather, an original dimension.²⁴⁶

In order to more fully understand the reasons why God created man male and female, it is necessary, according to Scola, to look at the Incarnation, the intra-Trinitarian

²⁴² See *Il Mistero Nuziale. 1. Uomo-Donna* (Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1998), 17-18; these can also be found in “The Dignity and Mission of Women: The Anthropological and Theological Foundations,” *Communio* 25 (1998): 46-48.

²⁴³ In addition to the above references, see “The Nuptial Mystery at the Heart of the Church,” *Communio* 25 (1998): 630-662; “L’*imago Dei* e la sessualità umana. A proposito di una tesi originale della ‘*Mulieris dignitatem*,’” *Anthropotes* 8 (1992): 61-73.

²⁴⁴ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 48.

²⁴⁵ See *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ See Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 49.

life, and the relationship between Christ and the Church. “In the revelation of the Son of God incarnate,” he writes, “we should therefore be better able to shed light on dual unity, even the dual unity of man and woman.”²⁴⁷ It is through Jesus’ hypostatic union that man and God meet. This meeting is not one that is casual or remote, rather, it is intimate; it is “spousal.”²⁴⁸ “The dual unity of man and woman is remade in the hypostatic union of Christ which becomes its foundation.”²⁴⁹ In Jesus’ hypostatic union the plan of God is revealed, the plan that desires all mankind to participate in God’s own divine life (cf. 2 Pet 1:4).

But our understanding of the Incarnation of Jesus must be clarified by our understanding of the Trinitarian relations. As Scola notes: “It is within the dynamic of the divine Life, within the relation between the Father and the Son and the Spirit, within the so-called ‘processions,’ that we must look for the possibility of the Incarnation.”²⁵⁰ Indeed, the Incarnation “presupposes the intra-Trinitarian life as a unity of nature and a trinity of persons. The mystery of the Trinity, therefore, is the ultimate foundation of dual unity.”²⁵¹ While this may seem abstract, Scola is wont to make clear that it is nothing of the sort. Because of the relationship that exists between man and woman, because of the “dual unity” of the human being, we have access to the Trinitarian life. “In dual unity we

²⁴⁷ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 50.

²⁴⁸ See, Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 50. “When you took on flesh, Lord Jesus, you made a marriage of mankind with God. Help us to be faithful to your word and endure our exile bravely, until we are called to the heavenly marriage feast, to which the Virgin Mary, exemplar of your Church, has preceded us.” *Psalm-Prayer*, Daytime Prayer, Saturday Week IV, *The Liturgy of the Hours*.

²⁴⁹ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 51.

²⁵⁰ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 51.

²⁵¹ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 51. See also, Scola, *Il Mistero Nuziale*, 38-40.

find an analogy of the Trinitarian communion.”²⁵² Not only do we have access to the divine life, but Scola, echoing John Paul II, writes that “[t]he image of God is completed in interpersonal communion.”²⁵³

Finally, to understand the foundations for “the unity of the two,” we must look to the relationship between Christ and the Church. This relationship is analogous for the husband-wife relationship. The husband-wife relationship explains the spousal character of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and the relationship between Christ and the Church serves as the sacramental foundation for the relationship between husband and wife.²⁵⁴

The thoughts of the Holy Father on these matters, Scola contends, are one of the most significant contributions of his pontificate; they are thoughts with far-reaching consequences for all of theology.²⁵⁵ The ramifications of not grasping what the Pope is teaching are many, not the least of which might be our inability to see “difference” as anything other than something to be overcome, as something evil. When we lose sight of the reality that within the Trinity there is unity and difference, and that this difference makes unity possible, we run the risk of losing the ability to conceive of sexuality as something positive. “The result of all this will be the censure or the insignificance of sexuality.”²⁵⁶

²⁵² Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 51.

²⁵³ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 51.

²⁵⁴ See Scola, *Il Mistero Nuziale*, 40-41; *MD*, 23-27.

²⁵⁵ See Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 51.

²⁵⁶ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 52.

Thus, our understanding of marriage and family is directly affected by our understanding of the Incarnation, Trinitarian relations, and Christ's love for his Bride.

In fact, to speak about Trinitarian unity and the hypostatic union as the ultimate foundation of the dual unity of man and woman, shows us that difference, without confusion and without separation, is something positive, something that exalts, not destroys, unity. This enables us to see that unity is the full meaning of difference. Difference, or alterity, is a path to a more complete unity. This alone suffices to explain why, in the sacrament of marriage, through which the woman constitutes with man *one flesh*, the salvific will of the God of Jesus Christ is expressed, the will of him who asks man not to separate what God has united.²⁵⁷

“Dual unity” helps explain the nuptial nature of the human person, who is created in the image and likeness of God. In marriage, it is because of both their unity *and* their difference that the husband and wife are able to make a gift of self to the other person, to enter into interpersonal communion. In fact, unless they do so, keeping in mind the teaching of *Gaudium et spes* 24, it will be impossible for either the husband or the wife to ever reach fulfillment.²⁵⁸

As a means to further elaborate on the concept of “dual unity,” Scola has coined a new term: “asymmetrical reciprocity.” By “reciprocal” he means to say that “there exists another modality other than my own for embodying the total identity (*corpore et anima unus*) of the human person, namely, that of the woman.”²⁵⁹ The other, in this case, the woman, “is presented to me as identical in her own being as a person but, at the same time, because of sexual difference, she reveals to me a radical difference that distinguishes her from me at all levels. Thus, if my way of embodying the identity of

²⁵⁷ Scola, “The Dignity and Mission of Women,” 52.

²⁵⁸ See Scola, *Il Mistero Nuziale*, 28; *Gaudium et spes*, 12.

²⁵⁹ Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 643.

person is masculine, the feminine mode that stands before me is *a different way* of being a person.”²⁶⁰ For a man to see a woman, in other words, is to realize that there is another way of being human, a way that is inaccessible to me.²⁶¹

This reciprocity within the man-woman relationship, however, is not one that is symmetrical but, rather, asymmetrical. Why is this the case? This is so, Scola maintains, because reciprocity is often understood as “simple complementarity.”²⁶² But *sexual* reciprocity is no such thing. Therefore, it is necessary to add the modifier “asymmetrical.” Asymmetry means that because of the difference, in this case, the sexual difference, the other will always remain “other” for me.²⁶³ This remains the case even in the one flesh union that exists in marriage. The husband is always “other” than the wife, and vice versa. The *reason* for this “asymmetrical reciprocity,” according to Scola, is that it makes room for “a third.” As he observes: “The reciprocity does not cancel the difference because it is asymmetrical, since it exists not for the sake of androgynous union of two halves, but for the procreation of the child. This is the fruit that is essentially connected to the love of the two persons.”²⁶⁴

In considering the foundations for “dual unity” to be found in 1) the hypostatic union of Christ, 2) the intra-Trinitarian life, and, 3) the relationship between Christ and the Church, Scola emphasizes that to understand the man-woman relationship in marriage, it

²⁶⁰ Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 643.

²⁶¹ See Scola, *Il Mistero Nuziale*, 125. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, II*, 344-360.

²⁶² See Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 645.

²⁶³ See Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 645. See also, Scola, *Il Mistero Nuziale*, 122-127.

²⁶⁴ Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 646.

is necessary to work from “the top down.” Too often, it seems, our tendency is to work from “the bottom up”, that is, trying to project something onto the divine relationships based on our experience in marriage.²⁶⁵ The husband and wife, and this is most important to state clearly, are not “the pattern,” they are not “the starting point.” The “pattern,” or “starting point,” is the relationship – the *spousal relationship* – that exists between Christ and the Church, the hypostatic union, and the life of the Trinity. From *these* we learn about marriage. As Scola writes: “The experience of the man-woman relation thus encounters its fullest meaning only in reference to [its] original relation” – the one between Christ and his bride, the Church.²⁶⁶ “The truth of nuptiality is thus contained in the modality by which Christ generates his Bride in the total self-gift of the cross, and continues his relationship with her according to the logic of this sacrament.”²⁶⁷

However, in talking this way, it is also most important to state clearly that this is not something that has no practical import for every day husbands and wives. Indeed, in the sacrament of marriage, husbands and wives are called to *participate*²⁶⁸ in the very love that exists between Christ and his bride, the Church. This participation is something that is *real*. Christ is not merely some far off model from the past for us to try and

²⁶⁵ See Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 649-651.

²⁶⁶ Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 651.

²⁶⁷ Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 651.

²⁶⁸ For more on this concept of “participation,” see Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki and Anna-Tymieniecka. Analecta Husserliana 10. (Dodrecht/Boston: Reidel, 1979), esp. Chapter 7; see also Wojtyła, “Participation or Alienation?” esp. 201-206 and “The Person: Subject and Community,” esp. 237-238, 254-255, both in *Person and Community*.

imitate; he is calling us to follow him – now!²⁶⁹ As Scola writes: “The sacrament of marriage, or rather marriage in as much as it is a sacrament, puts at the disposal of the spouses’ freedom the great resource of the perfect love by which Christ, who gave his life for his Church, makes her love his Bride and preserves her from wrinkle or stain.”²⁷⁰ Only through this vision is “the fundamental experience of being human flooded with light at every level, including that of the asymmetrical reciprocity found in the man-woman relationship.”²⁷¹

The significance of the concept of asymmetrical reciprocity for our topic, the mutual subordination of husband and wife, is this: in all three foundational aspects of “dual unity” there is a total gift of self. In the Incarnation of the Son of God, the humanity of Jesus is put entirely at the disposal of his divinity, and the divinity of Christ is put entirely at the disposal of his humanity, yet they remain distinct, without confusion. Within the Trinitarian life, the Father lavishly gives away everything to the Son, who likewise returns everything entirely to the Father, and the bond and the fruit of that love

²⁶⁹ For more on the tendency among many modern Christians to reduce Jesus to a mere fact of the past, see Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 650-651. “The basic meaning is clear. Paul [in Eph 5:21-33]...demands that Christian marriage be an unconditional following of Christ. He does not mean that the two partners, as individual Christians, must each follow Christ; he makes it very clear that their marriage itself is to be a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the Church...In marriage, as in all other human situations, Christ is our model, but a model to be *imitated*, not a model which can ever be duplicated...Christian marriage can take its structure from the relationship between Christ and the Church, even though that relationship presents an archetype which marriage can never perfectly resemble...[T]he Redeemer of the world is also the one who brings the order of creation to perfection, and he opens up marriage, grounded as it is in the order of creation, so that it becomes a way to follow him in a very specific manner.” Balthasar, “A Word on *Humanae Vitae*,” 205-208.

²⁷⁰ Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 652. “[Sacraments] effectively cause what they symbolize, and do so precisely through symbolizing it. Thus marriages that are *communiones* of reciprocal, passionate, and faithful self-giving love do not just resemble, symbolize and thereby reveal the spousal love of God for his people and of Christ for his Church. They cause the presence of divine spousal love in the Church, and in the world.” Rousseau, “The Call to *Communio*,” 227.

²⁷¹ Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery,” 651.

between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit, yet they remain distinct Persons, without confusion.²⁷² Finally, in the spousal relationship that exists between Christ and his Bride, the Church, there is the total gift of self, for he hands himself over for his Bride, yet they remain distinct, without confusion. Thus, for the human person who is created in this divine image, for the husband or wife created in this divine image, there can be no fulfillment, no perfection,²⁷³ without making of one's life the same "reckless" gift of self.²⁷⁴ A genuine declaration of love within marriage cannot keep from saying "I give you everything."

Prudence Allen and Integral Sex Complementarity

The thinker to conclude my reflections on the human being created in the image of God will be Sister Prudence Allen. In particular, I wish to look at her concept of "integral sex complementarity." This concept will serve as a further means to expand upon the thoughts of Balthasar, John Paul II, and Scola in understanding how man and

²⁷² "It is possible to say...that the Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial 'kenosis' within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis. For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he 'imparts' to the Son all that he is...Inherent in the Father's love is an absolute renunciation: he will not be God for himself alone. He lets go of his divinity... The Son's answer to the gift of the Godhead (of equal substance with the Father) can only be eternal thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to the Father, the Source – a thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father's original self-surrender. Proceeding from both, as their subsistent 'We', there breathes the 'Spirit' who is common to both: as the essence of love, he maintains the infinite difference between them, seals it, and since he is the one Spirit of them both, bridges it." Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, IV*, 323-324. See also Scola, "The Nuptial Mystery," 654-655.

²⁷³ "For St. Thomas, our excellence, or goodness, is existential. The goodness of any creature is the very act of being by which it exists. Our human goodness, then, depends directly on the degree to which we are real. And our degree of reality depends on the degree to which we fulfill the nature that is our mode of existing, the nature of human persons...and the only way in which we can fulfill ourselves is through *communio* with what is not ourselves – other persons, ultimately with God himself." Rousseau, "The Call to *Communio*," 213-214.

²⁷⁴ For a much more elaborate explanation of these points, see Scola, "The Nuptial Mystery," 648-658.

woman are created in the image of God and can only fulfill themselves by making a sincere gift of self to another.

Allen says that in the history of philosophy there have been three basic models used to explain the relationship between man and woman: sex unity, sex polarity, and sex complementarity.²⁷⁵ *Sex unity*, which has Plato as one of its first postulators, claims that there is no significant difference between man and woman. The body is seen as unimportant, and man and woman are held to be of equal worth and dignity. The danger, according to Allen, with this model, is that the differences between the sexes are disregarded and the body is undervalued. *Sex polarity*, which has Aristotle among its adherents, claims that there are philosophical differences between man and woman, and that man is, by nature, superior to woman.²⁷⁶ The danger of this model, according to Allen, is that it disregards equality and over-values the body of one of the sexes.²⁷⁷ *Sex complementarity*, the third model, holds that there are real philosophical differences between man and woman, but that woman is not inferior to man. Allen argues that Augustine operated along these lines, but he never carried them out to their logical conclusion. Hildegard of Bingen, then, is the one Allen credits as giving this model its

²⁷⁵ See "Fuller's *Synergetics* and Sex Complementarity," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1992): 3-16; "Integral Sex Complementarity and the Theology of Communion," *Communio* 17 (1990): 523-544; "Sex and Gender Differentiation in Hildegard of Bingen and Edith Stein," *Communio* 20 (1993): 389-414. "A Woman and Man as Prime Analogical Beings," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1992): 465-482. In this paragraph I am summarizing her thought as it appears in "Integral Sex Complementarity" and "Fuller's *Synergetics*."

²⁷⁶ Allen points out that Aquinas and Albert the Great incorporated this theory into Christian philosophy. However, since Aquinas' philosophy was empirical, given what we know now, it is quite doubtful he would still maintain this view.

²⁷⁷ There is a different version of sex polarity, known as "reverse sex polarity," introduced by Henrich Cornelius Agrippa (d. 1536), which holds that women are superior to men, based on the revelation that woman was created last in the creation account in Gen 2:18-25. See "Integral Sex Complementarity," 529-530.

most complete early formulation. The problem with Hildegard's thought is that it often fell into what Allen calls "fractional sex complementarity." By this, Allen means that Hildegard, and later, Edith Stein, "sometimes divided masculine and feminine characteristics into parts so that one sex necessarily had one aspect and the other had the complement aspect."²⁷⁸ The danger with this model, then, is that *the human being*, as such, was understood to be fractional; both a man and a woman are required to make a single whole person.

The proper model for understanding the philosophical question regarding sex identity, Allen claims, is what she calls "integral sex complementarity."

My thesis of integral sex complementarity...claims that a man or a woman as an individual has reason and intuition, understanding and sense, or universal and particular judgments. Each is a whole in respect to these epistemological categories. But, when a man and a woman interact in a relationship of complementarity, because some of the content of their consciousness is different because of their different relationships to maleness, femaleness, masculinity, and femininity, the interaction leads to something more. Using a mathematical metaphor it could be said that fractional sex complementarity is expressed as $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$, while integral sex complementarity is expressed as $1 + 1 = 3$.²⁷⁹

Allen's thought is made possible, in part, by the development in western philosophy in the past century that has differentiated between the individual and the person. According to this differentiation, an "individual is someone who defines himself or herself away from a crowd, or the more universal mass of humanity in general. A *person*, on the other hand, actively creates the self through relationship with other persons in social and communal bonds."²⁸⁰ This recent trend in philosophical thought has

²⁷⁸ Allen, "Integral Sex Complementarity," 528. See also "Fuller's *Synergetics*," 4, note 4.

²⁷⁹ Allen, "Fuller's *Synergetics*," 4, note 4.

²⁸⁰ Allen, "Integral Sex Complementarity," 537.

given rise to “personalism,” a branch of philosophy that both influenced and has been influenced by Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II. The basic notion of this thought could be summarized by the expression “the person reveals himself and fulfills himself through his actions.”²⁸¹ In “existential personalism,” a development of personalism, this thought has become “the person creates his own identity by making a sincere gift of himself to other persons.”²⁸²

Allen argues that her theory of integral sex complementarity, when combined with the notion of person as understood above, can be a useful tool for providing a philosophical basis for Christian community and for giving us insight into the Trinity, the ultimate basis for all Christian community.²⁸³ The two main components in integral sex complementarity are both present in the Trinity: equality and difference. Thus, Allen writes, “The divine persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are above all in a relation of integral complementarity.”²⁸⁴ “Since both analogies contain the two dynamics of sameness and difference, it is possible to reflect on the ways in which relations among communion of persons might be considered similar in both the Divine Being and in human beings. One example would be that of ‘self-gift’ of one person to another person.”²⁸⁵ Allen concludes

²⁸¹ See Allen, “Integral Sex Complementarity,” 537-538. This is the basic idea in Wojtyla’s *The Acting Person*.

²⁸² See Allen, “Integral Sex Complementarity,” 538.

²⁸³ See Allen, “Integral Sex Complementarity,” 540-544.

²⁸⁴ Allen, “Integral Sex Complementarity,” 541.

²⁸⁵ Allen, “A Man and a Woman as Prime Analogical Beings,” 479. One must obviously keep in mind that we are talking analogously here, and thus, must remember that with an analogy the difference is greater than the similarity. For example, the Holy Trinity *is* a relationship of three Persons, whereas human persons *have* relationships among other human persons.

There is something real about the analogy of communion of persons and of the call for communities of human persons to be ever more full reflections of the image of the Divine Community of Persons. What kind of philosophical structure for a theory of analogy can be provided to explain this? The answer to this question may be found in the clue of the concept of a person as one who is oriented towards another person in the form of the “gift of the self to the other.” It is the repetition of this willed act of self as a gift to another person that is the necessary condition for building up a human communion of persons. If we think about the fact that God is relationship, and that this relationship is one of perpetual offering of one Divine Person to another, of the Son to the Father, of the Holy Spirit to the Son and the Father, we can recognize that the relation of two persons in the form of mutual self-gift becomes the real basis for the communion of persons. Perhaps this could be called an “inter-relational analogy of being.”²⁸⁶

Conclusion

I began this chapter by returning “to the beginning,” to the stories of creation as revealed in Gen 1:26-28 and 2:18-25, to attempt to lay a theological and anthropological foundation upon which the Pope’s teaching that all subordination within marriage must be understood as a mutual subordination. I have examined briefly these texts, concentrating on the revelation that man is created in the image and likeness of God, and that man exists as male and female. I have shown that being in “the image of God” – thanks to the revelation we have received regarding the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the relationship of Christ and the Church – consist not only of having such qualities as reason and will, it also consists of being made “for” another, being made for a communion of love.

I have then expanded further upon these initial reflections by examining the insights of John Paul II, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Angelo Scola, and Prudence Allen. Each of these thinkers, with his or her respective concepts of “the unity of the two,” “dual

²⁸⁶ Allen, “A Woman and a Man as Prime Analogical Beings,” 481.

unity,” asymmetrical reciprocity,” and “integral sex complementarity,” have helped to further our understanding of the significance of the fact that man “always and only exists” as male and female.²⁸⁷ The sum total of what has been examined reveals that the Trinity is a relationship of radical and reckless self-gift. So, then, the human person created in that image, can only find fulfillment and perfection by participating in and actualizing that Trinitarian life.²⁸⁸

The teaching of the Holy Father that within marriage all subordination must be understood as mutual subordination cannot be understood apart from an adequate understanding of the human person created in the image of God. The Pope’s teaching, then, does not seem to be a *moral* one but an *ontological* one. The Pope is not articulating a demand that comes from *without*, say, from the magisterial teaching arm of the Church. Rather, the Pope is articulating a demand that comes from *within*, that is, from within the depths of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, who can only find fulfillment and perfection by making a sincere gift of self to another. Given the reflections that have been offered by John Paul II, Balthasar, Scola, and Allen, it seems accurate to say that the ultimate foundation for the teaching of the Holy Father on the mutual subordination of husband and wife within marriage is the existential reality that man *must* give of himself if he is to fulfill himself. His very being cries out for this. It is a demand that arises from within the person himself.

²⁸⁷ See *MD*, 1.

²⁸⁸ Wondrously, this is the reason for which man was made: to share in God’s own life! Among many possible passages, see 2 Pet 1:4.

Chapter Three

Introduction

After having looked at the scriptural foundation for the papal exhortation on mutual subordination within marriage (chapter one), as well as the philosophical/anthropological foundation for that exhortation (chapter two), the purpose of this chapter is to anticipate and respond to a significant question that may arise at this point. This question considers all that has been said thus far, but looking at the text of Eph 5:21-33 asks, “How does the scriptural teaching that the husband is called the ‘head’ of his wife fit in with mutual subordination? Are not these two concepts in conflict with one another?”²⁸⁹ This question will be answered first, by examining the concept of authority in general; second, by applying that concept to headship; and, third, by considering what Pope John Paul II has contributed to the understanding of headship.

Authority and Headship

The author of the Letter to the Ephesians writes: “For [only] in the same way that the Messiah is the head of the church – he, the savior of his body – is the husband the head of his wife” (5:23).²⁹⁰ Several points must be made here. First, this is an *analogy*. In analogies, a judgment is being made that there is some objective feature held in common by different realities.²⁹¹ The husband’s headship is analogous to Christ’s headship. It is

²⁸⁹ It must be noted, after all, that the wife is never called “head” of her husband.

²⁹⁰ As translated by Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 607.

²⁹¹ See Martin, *The Feminist Question*, esp. 223-229; Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1, 13, 5.

most important to keep in mind here the teaching of the Church regarding the analogy of being, namely, that “no similarity can be said to hold between Creator and creature which does not imply a greater dissimilarity between the two.”²⁹² Clearly, then, the husband’s headship is a limited one in comparison to Christ’s, but it is still a real one.

It must also be observed that it has been the case in the Church that this passage has been wrongly interpreted by some to mean that the wife is somehow in a position of inferiority in regard to her husband. For example, no less a figure than Thomas Aquinas was unable to adequately articulate the relationship that exists between the two spouses.

Let women be subject to their husbands because “a woman, if she have superiority, is contrary to her husband” as Ecclesiasticus 25 (30) affirms. So he especially warns them about subjection. This is **as to a lord** since the relation of a husband to his wife is, in a certain way, like that of a master to his servant, insofar as the latter ought to be governed by the commands of his master. The difference between these two relationships is that the master employs his servants in whatever is profitable to himself; but a husband treats his wife and children in reference to the common good.²⁹³

Despite the final sentence, Aquinas’ understanding of the husband-wife relationship is certainly at odds with the understanding of Pope John Paul II.²⁹⁴

Not all commentators, however, have understood the husband-wife relationship as Aquinas did. For example, John Chrysostom comes to a markedly different conclusion

²⁹² Fourth Lateran Council, DS 806, as translated in “Analogy,” Ghislain Lafont, in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: St.Pauls, Crossroad Publishing Co, 1994), 6.

²⁹³ *Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb (Albany: Magi Books, 1966), 217. In fairness to Aquinas, it should be mentioned that he elsewhere clearly states that wives are not property and thus not akin to slaves. See *In sent.*, 4, d. 38, *expositio textus*, ad.2; *Summa Theologiae*, 1., q. 92, a. 3.

²⁹⁴ Commenting in upon Eph 5:22, Pope John Paul II writes, “In saying this, the author does not intend to say that the husband is the lord of the wife and that the interpersonal pact proper to marriage is a pact of domination of the husband over the wife.” *TB*, 310.

than Aquinas. He begins his discourse on Eph 5 by affirming, “There is no relationship between human beings as close as that of husband and wife, if they are united as they ought to be.”²⁹⁵ Unlike Aquinas, Chrysostom *contrasts* the husband-wife relationship to the master-servant relationship: “A servant can be taught submission through fear; but even he, if provoked too much, will soon seek his escape. But one’s partner for life, the mother of one’s children, the source of one’s every joy, should never be fettered with fear and threats, but with love and patience. What kind of marriage can there be when the wife is afraid of her husband?”²⁹⁶ Chrysostom even refers to the wife as “a second authority.” “The wife is a secondary authority, but nevertheless she possesses real authority and equality of dignity while the husband still retains the role of headship; the welfare of the household is thus maintained.”²⁹⁷

In some ways anticipating what John Paul II will write nearly 1600 years later, Chrysostom affirms *both* the equality in dignity and worth of the spouses *and* the exclusive headship of the husband.

Let us assume, then, that the husband is to occupy the place of the head, and the wife that of the body, and listen to what “headship” means: “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His Body, and is Himself its Savior”...Notice that after saying “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church,” he immediately says that the Church is His Body, and He Himself is its Savior. It is the head that upholds the well-being of the body.²⁹⁸

One of the purposes of headship, according to Chrysostom, is to be the ultimate means of “peace” within the household, for “where there is equal authority, there never is

²⁹⁵ Homily 20 *On Ephesians 5:22-33*, in *On Marriage and Family Life*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 43.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁹⁷ See *ibid.*, 53, 57.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

peace. A household cannot be a democracy, ruled by everyone, but the authority must necessarily rest in one person.”²⁹⁹ The model for this authority is, of course, Jesus, the head of the Church; Christ’s love for the Church “informs” the husband’s love for his bride. “To the husband he [the author of Ephesians] speaks of love, and obliges him to love, and tells him how he should love, thus binding and cementing him to his wife...Do you not see, husband, the great honor that God desires you to give to your wife? He has taken you from your father and bound you to her.”³⁰⁰

Much of the difficulty surrounding the notion of headship stems from a distorted view of authority in general. Not infrequently, authority is understood as the power to arbitrarily impose one’s will upon another (or others). It is equated, commonly, with domination and a curtailment of another’s freedom.³⁰¹ However, as Waldemar Molinski notes, “The word authority is from the Latin *auctoritas*, from *auctor* (cause, sponsor, promoter, surety), from *augere* (to increase...to enrich).”³⁰² The nature of authority, then, “must be distinguished from power and coercion.”³⁰³ Power “does not promote freedom, and coercion ends it.”³⁰⁴ True authority, on the other hand, is “always in the service of

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53. Other modern writers also tend to emphasize this aspect of headship. See, for example, May, “Marriage and the Complementarity of Male and Female,” 57-60. See also, William E. May, “The Mission of Fatherhood: ‘To Reveal and Relive in Earth the Very Fatherhood of God,’” John Paul II Institute for Studies in Marriage and the Family Lecture Series on “The Crisis of Paternity,” November 1, 1999 (unpublished).

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

³⁰¹ See Martin, *The Feminist Question*, 184-189, for a discussion of how one of the most damaging effects of the Enlightenment has been the equating of causality with domination. Also very helpful is Ashley, *Justice in the Church*, esp. 1-130; and Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus: Living a Christian Life*, Vol II (Quincy: Franciscan Press, 1992), 431-431, 435.

³⁰² “Authority,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Burns & Oates, 1975), 61.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

others and their freedom. Its object is always to help men to attain their full manhood.”³⁰⁵

Authority helps the other(s) to reach fulfillment.³⁰⁶

The ultimate authority is God, and he is not dominating or oppressive towards his creation, but generous.³⁰⁷ Simply out of love God creates. Creation itself need not be; it is totally free; it is God’s *gift*.³⁰⁸ God, therefore, is not a threat to his creation, or his creation’s freedom and life; God is “the very ground of [creation’s] being, nature, and substance.”³⁰⁹ Within created reality, God has created the human person so that he or she can share in God’s own divine life (cf. Eph 1:5; 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4). “God’s creative act is so powerful that...it endows the very contingency of the creature...with the abundance of the Creator’s own gift.”³¹⁰ There is, then, in creation and causality, an *initiative* on God’s part. God takes “the first step.”

The initiative of God reaches its fulfillment in Jesus, who, not only in his words,³¹¹ but above all by his passion, death, and resurrection, shows the extent of God’s

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, 61. “There is no true authority without love, for God puts authority into the hands of men that they might be at the service of others.” John Haas, “The Christian Heart of Fatherhood: The Place of Marriage, Authority, and Service in the Recovery of Fatherhood,” *Touchstone* 14 (2001): 47-52.

³⁰⁷ See, for example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1,19,2.

³⁰⁸ Kenneth Schmitz writes, regarding the description “gift”: “The absolute nature of ontological dependence entitles us to use the category of gift to articulate the implications of the relation, since it belongs to a gift to be uncalled for, to be given without prior conditions.” “Created Receptivity and the Philosophy of the Concrete,” *The Thomist* 61, no. 3 (1997), 363.

³⁰⁹ Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 367.

³¹⁰ Schmitz, “Created Receptivity,” 358. For a more thorough analysis of this theme see his *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982). Writing about how created beings emulate God’s causality, Francis Martin writes, “Created causality shares in its own way the nature of God’s causality. This can be seen in the manner in which one being communicates something of itself to another, in the way in which the act of knowing consists of receiving what the known is sharing of itself, and most especially in the interaction of persons.” “The New Feminism: A New Humanism?” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 8 (2001), 18.

³¹¹ See, for example, Mt: 20:24-28 and parallels.

love, generosity and goodness. In the process, he also reveals definitively the true meaning of authority. In the words of Molinski above, one could say that the words and deeds of Jesus are in the service of the human person and his or her freedom. Ultimately, only through the Paschal Mystery is the human person able to reach fulfillment, i.e., a sharing in the divine life.

Human authority finds its concrete model in the person of Jesus. To be genuine, then, all human authority must resemble Christ's. When applied to the marital relationship, the measure of a husband's headship is none other than Jesus. Just as Jesus cared for his bride and gave his whole life for her, so too *must* a husband.³¹² In Jesus we see conclusively that God's authority is rooted in his love for his creation. So, too, among human persons, the only true source of headship is love. As Martin, in an already quoted passage writes, "Headship is an active, caring relationship, an expression of the self-giving *agapē* that husbands are consistently told to have in regard to their wives...it is not a power base, but a particular way of being a disciple, *and the husband's way of being subordinate to the wife.*"³¹³

When authority is understood rightly, one is able to see that there is a great responsibility on the part of the human person to whom that position is given. His task is to care for the one(s) entrusted to him, to ensure the well-being of the other(s), to, in some sense, seek to increase the life of the other(s). Just as all of human creation must

³¹² It is to be recalled that three times the husband is given the *command* to love his wife in Eph 5:25-33.

³¹³ Martin, *The Feminist Question*, 399, italics mine.

respond in some fashion to God’s generous and loving initiative, so too must those placed under the care of other men and women. In the marriage relationship, “the husband’s role is one of generosity, he is to ‘communicate actuality’ by laying down his life. The wife receives this gift and gives it actual existence.”³¹⁴ The husband’s initiative³¹⁵ does not mean that he is in any way superior to his wife, since if there is no other to receive the gift, the giving remains incomplete. As David Schindler notes, “[L]ove in all of its purity is not only a pouring forth but a receiving and giving back.”³¹⁶

Pope John Paul II on Headship

In looking at the Pope’s thought on headship, it is somewhat surprising to note the relatively scant attention he pays to the nature of the husband and the male person, especially in comparison to the great attention he gives to the wife and the female person. There is no *Dignitatem virum* in his papal repertoire.³¹⁷ There are, however, instances where the Pope touches on these issues, though never in as systematic a way as he does in

³¹⁴ Martin, “The New Feminism.” See also Mary Shivanandan, “Feminism and Marriage: A Reflection on Ephesians 5:21-33,” *Diakonia* 29, no.1 (1996): 5-22, esp. 13-22. For a short survey on the importance of various rites of passage necessary to prepare the man for this task, see Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 37-59.

³¹⁵ Initiative, especially when seen “through the lens” of the sexual act between husband and wife, seems to be one of the words best able to capture something of what is meant by headship. See, for example, Balthasar, “A Word on *Humanae Vitae*,” 204-228, esp. 216-223. See also Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 348-356; May, “Marriage and the Complementarity of Male and Female,” esp. 47-48; Rousseau, “The Call to *Communio*,” esp. 231; Schumacher, “The Prophetic Vocation of Women,” 154, n.24; Shivanandan, “Feminism and Marriage,” esp. 13-22.

³¹⁶ “Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization,” *Communio* 20 (1993), 205. Schindler is helpful in freeing “receptivity” from the misconception that it is equal to “passivity.”

³¹⁷ Some, like Leon J. Podles, accuse Pope John Paul II of maintaining a “discreet silence” altogether on the matter of the husband’s headship. See, “The Eternal Fatherly,” *Touchstone* 14 (2001): 3-4; “Missing Fathers of the Church: The Feminization of the Church and the Need for Christian Manhood,” *ibid.*, 26-32. As this chapter should illustrate, the Pope has not in fact been silent. Some, like Basil Cole, O.P., have taken strands of the Pope’s thought on the male person and sought to expound further upon them. See, for example, his “Reflections on Fatherhood and Priesthood,” *The Priest* (December, 1999), 32-36.

Letter to Women or *Mulieris dignitatem*. It will be my purpose here to examine those places where the Holy Father discusses the nature of headship, and in the process how he sees it as being entirely in keeping with the mutual subordination called for among spouses. Accordingly, I will look at his thought as it is found in *Pastores dabo vobis* (PDV), *Mulieris dignitatem* (MD), *Redemptoris custos* (RC), “Letter to Families” (LF), *Familiaris consortio* (FC), and the Wednesday audiences that make up “the theology of the body” (TB).³¹⁸

Pastores Dabo Vobis

One of the places where the Holy Father most frequently discusses the notion of headship is in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*. This exhortation deals with the formation of seminarians, who, upon ordination to the priesthood, will share in the life of Christ the Head of the Church. Because the husband is head of his wife “as Christ is the head of his body, the Church,” we are able to learn about the nature of headship by examining what the Holy Father has to say to those men who will go on to participate ontologically in that same headship. Here, then, is one of the ways in which the differing states of life serve to encourage each other. A husband can learn much about the nature of headship by a priest’s self-giving relationship with the Church; and a priest can learn much about the nature of headship by a husband’s self-giving relationship with his wife.

³¹⁸ I am obviously not looking at all of the documents written and homilies and addresses given by Pope John Paul II. One would also do well to consult the plays of Karol Wojtyła, especially “Radiation of Fatherhood,” in *The Collected Plays and Writings on the Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987).

In Chapter Three, writing on the spiritual life of the priest, the Holy Father comments on the fact that “the priest is configured to Jesus Christ as Head and Shepherd of the Church.”³¹⁹ The Pope uses as his point of departure Eph 5:23, Jesus Christ is head of the Church, his body,³²⁰ to explain of what this consists. Jesus “is the ‘Head’ in the new and unique sense of being a ‘servant’, according to his own words: ‘The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mk 10:45).”³²¹ Christ’s authority as Head cannot be understood apart from his self-giving sacrifice on the cross. As he notes, “The authority of Jesus Christ as Head coincides then with his service, with his gift, with his total, humble and loving dedication on behalf of the Church.”³²² Beginning with a discussion on the nature of Christ’s headship, the Holy Father moves to a discussion of the priest, who shares in Christ’s authority and headship by virtue of his ordination. The priest is to be a man whose life is marked by the same kind of servant authority that is evident in the cross.³²³

Pope John Paul II goes on to discuss at greater length Eph 5:23-29, stressing that the priest is to be a “living image of Jesus Christ, the Spouse of the Church.”³²⁴ The priest is “called to live out Christ’s spousal love towards the Church, his Bride. Therefore, the priest’s life ought to radiate this spousal character which demands that he be a witness to Christ’s spousal love, and thus be capable of loving people with a sincere heart which is

³¹⁹ Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores dabo vobis* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), 42.

³²⁰ See *ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² *Ibid.*, 43.

³²³ See *ibid.*

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

new, generous and pure, with genuine self-detachment, with full, constant, and faithful dedication...³²⁵ The power that makes such a life possible is a participation in Christ's own pastoral charity. The Holy Spirit endows the priest with this gift for the health and well-being of the Church. Thus, we read, "The essential content of this pastoral charity is *the gift of self*, the total gift of *self to the Church*, following the example of Christ."³²⁶ Aside from the example of Jesus, the Holy Father holds up for the priest to imitate "the deep love of a husband for his wife."³²⁷

The Pope's words to priests in this Apostolic Exhortation give further insight into the discussion on headship in general, and how headship is to be understood particularly in marriage. Though priesthood and marriage are two different states of life, both the ordained man and the married man share, in ways that differ in degree and kind,³²⁸ in Christ's mission as head. To both men is given the task of caring for the one entrusted to him, whether the other is the Church or the wife. This is a task that cannot be understood apart from the way that Jesus exercised his own headship. Pope John Paul II, then, in *Pastores dabo vobis*, explains that *to be* head means, in part, to be a servant, to make of one's life a gift of self – even to the point of really laying down one's life for the other(s). Such a life as this, such an exercise in authority as this, is really possible. It is possible for the priest by virtue of his ordination, which enables him to participate in Christ's own

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

³²⁸ See Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

pastoral charity; it is possible for the husband by virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, which likewise equips him with the necessary grace.³²⁹

Mulieris Dignitatem

The Holy Father treats the theme of headship within the larger context of his discussion regarding the “Great Mystery” in Chapter 7 of *Mulieris Dignitatem*. In this wider discussion, the Pope is eager to recall that the marital relationship, and all relationships between men and women, one must keep in mind the fundamental truth that the human person is created male and female. From this creation we learn that all men and women have been called to “spousal love.”³³⁰ The Letter to the Ephesians, the Holy Father continues, “confirms this truth, while at the same time comparing the spousal character of the love between man and woman to the mystery of Christ and of the Church. *Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church – the Church is the Bride.*”³³¹

³²⁹ For more on the grace actually conferred in marriage to the spouses, see The Council of Trent, 24th Session, *De doctrina sacramenti matrimonii*, in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. Original text with English Translation*, trans. H.J. Schroeder, O.P. (New York: B. Herder Book Co, 1941); Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, 6-8, in *The Papal Encyclicals. Vol II: 1878-1903*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Wilmington: McGrath Publishing Co, 1981); Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, n.d.), 23, 38-40, 42, 43; Pius XII, Address to New Spouses, January 17, 1940, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi di sua Santità Pio XII. Vol I* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1940); also his addresses to the same groups on July 12, 1939, *ibid.*; March 5, 1941, *Vol III*; and August 8, 1941, *ibid.*; Pius XII Radio Message to the Faithful of Haiti, January 8, 1949, *Vol X*; Radio Message to the Families of France, June 17, 1945, *Vol VII*; *Lumen gentium*, 11, 34-35, 41; *Gaudium et spes*, 47-52. *The Code of Canon Law*, §1055; *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1601-1666.

³³⁰ See *MD*, 23. This does not mean that all men and women are called to marriage, however. This is because celibacy is another dimension to spousal love. See *MD*, Chapter 6.

³³¹ *MD*, 23.

The analogy of Christ's spousal love for the Church is consistent with, and yet, at the same time, a radical expansion of, the prophetic image of marriage as describing God's love for the people of Israel.³³² Eph 5:21-33 is the "crowning confirmation" of the spousal imagery used in the Old Testament. The "analogy of the spousal relationship moves simultaneously in two directions...The covenant proper to spouses 'explains the spousal character of the union of Christ with the Church, and in its turn this union, as a 'sacrament', determines the sacramentality of marriage as a holy covenant between the two spouses, man and woman."³³³ It is important to understand that "this rich and complex passage, which *taken as a whole is a great analogy*," is, at the same time, a passage that "is addressed to the spouses as real women and men."³³⁴

As he did with priests and seminarians in *Pastores dabo vobis*, so here with husbands and men in general Pope John Paul II holds up Jesus as the model. In loving his wife, with whom he has freely entered into an exclusive and indissoluble bond, a husband affirms her equality with him as a person, thus enabling "the female personality to fully develop and be enriched. This is precisely the way Christ acts as the bridegroom of the Church."³³⁵ This is Christ's "style" in relating with women.³³⁶ Husbands too "should make their own the elements of this style in regard to their wives...In this way both men and women bring about 'the sincere gift of self.'"³³⁷ In saying that the husband is "head"

³³² See *ibid*, 23. For more on the how the new covenant is both in continuity and dis-continuity with the old covenant, see Henri de Lubac, *Sources of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), esp. 1-41, 85-158.

³³³ *MD*, 23.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 23, 24.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

of his wife, Ephesians is in no way contradicting this “style” of relating. As the Holy Father explains:

The author knows that this way of speaking, so profoundly rooted in the customs and religious tradition of the time, is to be understood and carried out in a new way: as a “*mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ*” (cf. Eph 5:21). This is especially true because the husband is called the “head” of his wife *as* Christ is the head of the Church; he is so in order to give “himself up for her” (Eph 5:25), and giving himself up for her means giving up even his own life.³³⁸

This new way of relating – i.e., “mutual subjection” – is an “innovation of the Gospel.”³³⁹ It is seen in the pages of the Gospel, and visibly manifest in the cross of Christ. This “innovation” is a “fact.”³⁴⁰ Sacred Scripture transmits this fact, for it is “the unambiguous content of the evangelical message and is the result of the Redemption.”³⁴¹ It is a message that is “clear and definitive.”³⁴² It means that, in the marriage relationship, all “the reasons in favor of the ‘subjection’ of woman to man... must be understood in the sense of a ‘mutual subjection’ of both ‘out of reverence for Christ.’”³⁴³ The Pope realizes, however, that this message has not been fully accepted over the centuries. The awareness of the message “must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behavior and

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24. This new style of relating between men and women is also identified in *Pastores dabo vobis* n. 9 as one of the “ideals coming to the fore” in the present age.

³³⁹ See *ibid.*, 24. “However, whereas in the relationship between Christ and the Church the subjection is only on the part of the Church, in the relationship between husband and wife the ‘subjection’ is not one-sided but mutual” (*MD*, 24).

³⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, 24.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁴² See *ibid.*, 24.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

customs. This is a call which from [the time of its revelation] onwards, does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew.”³⁴⁴

As the divine bridegroom, Jesus definitively shows the husband the true nature of love and headship. “Precisely because Christ’s divine love is the love of a Bridegroom, it is the model and pattern of all human love, men’s love in particular”, and a husband’s love even more particularly.³⁴⁵ Jesus the bridegroom is the one “who ‘has given himself’. ‘To give’ means ‘to become a sincere gift’ in the most complete and radical way: ‘Greater love has no man than this’ (Jn 15:13).”³⁴⁶ As the bridegroom, Jesus is the one who takes the initiative; he is the one “who ‘first loved us’ (cf. 1 Jn 4:19) and who, with the gift generated by this spousal love for man, has exceeded all human expectations.”³⁴⁷ To be the bridegroom, then, to be “head”, means to be the one who initiates love.

In the Eucharist, “*the Sacrament of our Redemption,*” “*the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride,*” the spousal love of God is completely revealed.³⁴⁸ In this sacrament, Christ pours out his blood and hands over his life – totally. As the Pope notes, “The ‘sincere gift’ contained in the Sacrifice of the Cross gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God’s love.”³⁴⁹ In the Eucharist, then, a husband is given an

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 24. “...how many generations were needed for such a principle [‘in Christ Jesus there is no slave or freeman’] to be realized in the history of humanity through the abolition of slavery! And what is one to say of the many forms of slavery to which individuals and peoples are subjected, which have not disappeared from history?” (*ibid.*)

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

exceptional gift to contemplate, for there he sees before his eyes he sees the true reality of headship: total giving. The Eucharist is not just to contemplate, though, for by participating in the Eucharist and partaking of the Lord's gift of self for his bride, the husband is strengthened to truly put that love into practice.

According to the Pope's interpretation in *Mulieris dignitatem*, the spousal analogy that is revealed in Eph 5:21-33 can be simplified to say: "the Bridegroom is the one who loves. The Bride is loved: *it is she who receives love, so as to love in return.*"³⁵⁰ Since the spousal analogy of Eph 5:21-33 "moves simultaneously in two directions" we know that this is true not only for Christ and the Church, but for husbands and wives. There is, then, a certain *initiative* that characterizes Christ's headship which should also characterize the headship of the husband. This is the initiative that reaches out towards the other in a radical and reckless gesture of self-giving love.

Redemptoris Custos

Though there is not a *Dignitatem virum* in the papal catalog, the Apostolic Exhortation on the life of St. Joseph is perhaps the closest thing to it. Promulgated one year to the day after *Mulieris dignitatem*, this brief document calls our attention to

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29. The Pope expands later in this same paragraph on this theme. "When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman with all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all persons – men and women." This is part of what the Pope means when he speaks of the "feminine genius." For further discussion on this, see Rousseau, "The Call to Communio" and Schumacher, "The Prophetic Vocation of Women."

“Joseph the just”, husband of Mary, and “guardian of the Redeemer.” In this reflection, Pope John Paul II reminds the faithful that “the Church deeply venerates [the Holy] Family, and proposes it as the model of all families.”³⁵¹ As such, his words on the character of Joseph will be helpful in illuminating the role of the husband as head of his wife.

As he does elsewhere,³⁵² the Holy Father stresses that the family is the Church in miniature – the “domestic Church.”³⁵³ As such, the Holy Family is the “prototype and example for all Christian families.”³⁵⁴ From the Holy Family Christians can learn that the family, in its essence, is about love. To the family is given “*the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love*”; the family members are to be “a living reflection of and a real sharing in God’s love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his Bride.”³⁵⁵

Though he remained united to Mary in a bond of virginal love,³⁵⁶ Joseph’s love for Mary was also truly marital, and so, aside from Jesus, he is the greatest model for husbands. In his life we learn that the husband, as head, is the one who seeks to ensure that the family, whose core is the relationship between husband and wife, is faithful to the mission of love. In his life we see an example of service, “a sacrifice to the mystery of the

³⁵¹ *Redemptoris custos* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1989), 21.

³⁵² See also *FC*, 51 ; *LF*, 19.

³⁵³ See *ibid.*, 7.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, quoting *FC*, 86.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, quoting *FC*, 17.

³⁵⁶ See *Collectio Missarum de Beata Maria Virgine*, 1, “Sancta Maria de Nazareth,” *Praefatio*.

Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it.”³⁵⁷ Though he was given the task of being the guardian of God incarnate and husband to the immaculate virgin Mary, Joseph made of his life “a total gift of self.” He “turned his human vocation to domestic love into a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house.”³⁵⁸

In Joseph’s life we see once again the *initiating* role of the husband as head. This is present, for example, in his obedient response to the message of the angel, who told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife (cf. Mt 1:20-25). Thus, despite fears within and constraints without, Joseph bound himself to Mary in marriage and loved her with a husband’s love.³⁵⁹ His initiative is apparent again in his obedient response to the angel’s warning in a dream that he should take the child Jesus and his mother to Egypt (cf. Mt. 1:13-15).³⁶⁰ Surely, such a decision meant that whatever plans he had in mind had to be put on hold, so as to protect and care for the ones entrusted to his loving care. Joseph’s love, like all human love, was only made possible by the grace of God, which, in the marriage relationship, is able to mold “the love of husband and wife, deepening within it everything of human worth and beauty, everything that bespeaks an exclusive gift of self, a covenant between persons, and an authentic communion according to the model of the Blessed Trinity.”³⁶¹ “Through his complete self-sacrifice, Joseph expressed his generous love for the Mother of God, and gave her a husband’s ‘gift of self.’”³⁶²

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 19.

³⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, 14.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 20.

Letter to Families

In his 1994 Letter to Families Pope John Paul II once again directs the attention of the faithful to Ephesians 5:21-33. As in *Mulieris dignitatem*, there is a section entitled “The Great Mystery.” Here, the Holy Father again expounds upon the development within the biblical revelation of the relationship between God and humanity culminating in Jesus Christ. And again, just as he wrote to seminarians about the nature of the priesthood in *Pastores dabo vobis*, the Pope here writes to husbands that it is only by gazing upon Christ and his relationship with the Church that they, as well as wives, can learn what they are *to be* for one another. Christ is “*the point of reference for their spousal love.*”³⁶³

The relationship that is “the great mystery”, i.e., Christ’s union with the Church, was prepared for by the prophetic revelation of Yahweh’s love for the people of Israel. The new covenant that is Christ, thus, was “deeply rooted” in Genesis, and in the whole of the Old Testament. “Nonetheless [the Letter to the Ephesians] represents a new approach which will later find expression in the Church’s magisterium.”³⁶⁴ In Christ “the confirmation and fulfillment of the spousal relationship between God and his people are realized.”³⁶⁵ Jesus is the one who definitively shows us that God loves us “to the end” (cf. John 13:1).³⁶⁶

³⁶³ *Letter to Families* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994), 74.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, 72.

Through the sacraments of initiation, the bride of Christ, that is, the Church, “is present in each of the baptized.”³⁶⁷ This means that all the members of the Church have received both a gift and a task: all have received status not only as God’s adopted children but his bride; all must cooperate with this gift and seek to genuinely live out lives of holiness. As a result of being incorporated into the body of Christ at baptism, as well as being nourished by Christ in the Eucharist, all Christians receive “the love with which the bridegroom has loved us to the end, a love which continually expands and lavishes on people an ever greater sharing in the supernatural life.”³⁶⁸ Once again, the truth is affirmed that the Christian does not just look to Christ as a distant model, but genuinely participates in his life. This participation is what enables husbands and wives to live out the demand of love that is marriage. The Holy Father asks: “Could we even imagine human love without the bridegroom and the love with which he first loved to the end? Only if husbands and wives share in that love and in that ‘great mystery’ can they love ‘to the end.’ Unless they share in it, they do not know ‘to the end’ what love truly is and how radical are its demands.”³⁶⁹

As he did in *Mulieris dignitatem* n. 24, the Pope again stresses that Eph 5:21, and the injunction “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,” belongs to the exhortation addressed to husbands and wives specifically, and not just to the wider Christian community in general. This teaching “is “unquestionably a new presentation of the eternal truth about marriage and the family in the light of the new covenant.”³⁷⁰ In the

³⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 72-73.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

cross of Christ, especially, spouses will find their point of reference, their example for love; in the cross, husband and wife see most visibly how the total gift of self looks.

It is the husband's genuine sharing in the life and love of Christ, and, like Christ, initiating the gift of love, that stirs the wife to respect him in return. Her respect, then, is a means of showing her love; it is a response to his initiating love. The Pope observes:

It is because of this love that husband and wife *become a mutual gift*. Love contains the acknowledgement of the personal dignity of the other, and of his or her absolute uniqueness. Indeed, each of the spouses, as a human being, has been willed by God from among all the creatures of the earth for his or her own sake. Each of them, however, by a conscious and responsible act, makes a free gift of self to the other and to the children received from the Lord.³⁷¹

Familiaris Consortio

In this Apostolic Exhortation addressed to the Church regarding the role of the Christian family in the modern world, the Pope provides two important contributions for our discussion. First, he emphasizes again the reality that husbands and wives truly participate in Christ's life through the sacrament of matrimony. Second, the Holy Father writes perhaps his most succinct thought on the practical nature of headship. The following excerpts illustrate that what has been said above about headship, specifically the husband's task of taking an initiating role of self-sacrifice in the marriage relationship, *is* possible; they will also "spell out" further how this headship is to be practically exercised.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

In the context of a discussion on the role of the family as a place of dialogue with the world,³⁷² the Holy Father writes

The sacrament of marriage is the specific source and the original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism. By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is made purified and made holy: “This love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity.”³⁷³

Earlier, touching again on how Jesus definitively fulfills the communion between God and man, John Paul II proclaims to couples that they are a “real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ.”³⁷⁴ The grace that a man and a woman receive in the sacrament of matrimony is such that they are given “a new heart”, and made “capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us.”³⁷⁵ Because they have died and risen with Christ in baptism, their “intimate community of conjugal life...is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by his redeeming power.”³⁷⁶ Through their exchange of consent, which binds them indissolubly together, “their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church.”³⁷⁷

³⁷² See *FC*, 55-62.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 56, quoting *Gaudium et spes*, 49.

³⁷⁴ *FC*, 13.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

The “redeeming power” of Christ is something that is lasting; it “accompanies the married couple throughout their lives.”³⁷⁸ This is the truth being communicated in *Gaudium et spes* 48, quoted by the Holy Father.

[Jesus] *abides with them so that*, just as he loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf, *the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal*...For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament *by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration* in the duties and dignities of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and familial obligations, *they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives* with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute to the glory of God.³⁷⁹

The image of the Eucharist is again held before couples as an unparalleled source of strength. This sacrament is “the very source of Christian marriage”, the power that enables spouses to “understand better and live more intensely the graces and responsibilities of Christian marriage and family life.”³⁸⁰ By participating in the Eucharist, spouses come into contact with the divine bridegroom’s love, thus coming into contact with “the source from which their own marriage flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed.”³⁸¹

In paragraph 25, a passage wherein he cites Eph 5:25, the Pope speaks directly to husbands and fathers. Echoing his teaching in *Mulieris dignitatem*, the Holy Father challenges men to have “a profound respect for the equal dignity” of their wives, “to developed a new attitude of love”, and to reveal to their wives a charity “both gentle and

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁷⁹ As quoted in *FC*, 56, italics mine.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

strong like that which Christ has for the Church.”³⁸² Pointing out how often cultural attitudes and pressures can shift a man’s attention away from his primary responsibilities of caring for his wife and family, especially the all-important role of educating children, the Holy Father reminds husbands that they must come to appreciate and understand that “the place of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance.”³⁸³

In perhaps his most direct and illuminating passage written to men, Pope John Paul II writes that a man is called upon to “reveal” and “relive” the fatherhood of God on earth.³⁸⁴ As such, his task is

to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family: he will perform this task by exercising generous responsibility for the life conceived under the heart of the mother, by a more solicitous commitment to education, a task which he shares with his wife, by work which is never the cause of division in the family but promotes its unity and stability, and by means of the witness he gives of an adult Christian life which effectively introduces the children into the living experience of Christ and the Church.³⁸⁵

While much of this passage is directed more specifically to men as fathers than as husbands, there is one significant point that can serve to further illuminate the exercise of headship. How many men there are in western culture who, at the expense of their

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁸³ *Ibid.* “As experience teaches, the absence of a father causes psychological and moral imbalance and notable difficulties in family relationships, as does, in contrary circumstances, the oppressive presence of a father, especially where there still prevails the phenomenon of ‘machismo’, or a wrong superiority of male prerogatives which humiliates women and inhibits the development of healthy family relationships” (*ibid.*). Helpful in furthering an understanding of the man’s role in family life in general is John W. Miller, *Biblical Faith and Fathering : Why We Call God “Father”* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989). See also David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

³⁸⁴ See *ibid.*

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

marriages, throw themselves into their career. Certainly, work is of great importance for the human person.³⁸⁶ However, in materialistic cultures, where doing and having is seen as more important than being,³⁸⁷ work is often distorted, and comes to rank of greater importance than marriage, family, and relationships. In the above passage, the Holy Father's words are very concrete and practical. One of the ways that a husband is called upon to exercise his role of headship is by ensuring that the work he engages in is such that it is not a "cause of division", but rather a cause of "stability" and "unity."³⁸⁸

Finally, it is of great importance, especially in a culture that has been so radically influenced by rationalism and its intolerance for all things mysterious, including marriage,³⁸⁹ that the leaders of the Church help Christian spouses to come to a fuller understanding of the nature of marriage. The Pope teaches: "In order that the family may be ever more a true community of love, it is necessary that all its members should be helped and trained in their responsibilities as they face the new problems that arise, in mutual service, and in active sharing in family life."³⁹⁰ Certainly, given the crisis regarding masculinity that is prevalent in western culture, many men are in great need of

³⁸⁶ For more on the Holy Father's reflections on the dignity of human labor, see especially the Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1991).

³⁸⁷ See Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1995), 23.

³⁸⁸ This is not at all to say that the husband has to be the only wage-earner, or even the primary one. "The father, in short, has primary responsibility to see that his wife and children are provided for. In saying this, I am not excluding the possibility that in specific families the wife-mother may be the one who can contribute economically to the family. It may be that she has special talents and has acquired more marketably profitable capacities and could therefore more adequately meet the financial needs of the family than could the husband-father. But even in such situations it is nonetheless the husband/father's responsibility to see to it that his wife and children are provided for." William E. May, "The Mission of Fatherhood."

³⁸⁹ See *LF*, 19.

³⁹⁰ *FC*, 69.

training so as to correctly understand what it means to have been given the task of *servi*ng their wife as “head.”³⁹¹

The Theology of the Body

The single most systematic presentation of papal thought on Eph 5:21-33, including the role of the husband as “head”, is found in Pope John Paul II’s Wednesday audiences on “the theology of the body.”³⁹² The Holy Father writes that “the author of Ephesians exhorts [couples] to mold their reciprocal relationship on the model of the spousal union of Christ and the Church.” More forcefully, the Holy Father says that that same author “orders [couples] to learn anew this sacrament of the spousal unity of Christ and the Church.”³⁹³ Indeed, “the spousal relationship of Christ to the Church is at the basis of an understanding of marriage in its essence.”³⁹⁴

In his discussion on Eph 5:21-33, the Pope writes that the husband and wife freely choose to enter into a union of mutual love, respect and subordination.³⁹⁵ The “source” for this mutual subordination is the virtue of *pietas*: the “respect for holiness, for the *sacrum*.”³⁹⁶ At the core, then, of the explanation of mutual subordination is the truth that one spouse sees in the other a person who has been personally chosen by God to become

³⁹¹ For more on this crisis, see Cole, “Reflections on Fatherhood and Priesthood.”

³⁹² These audiences span the time from July 28, 1982 through July 4, 1984.

³⁹³ *TB*, 351.

³⁹⁴ *TB*, 313.

³⁹⁵ See *TB*, 345-347, 355-357.

³⁹⁶ *TB*, 309.

an adoptive son in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:5) and to share in the divine life.³⁹⁷ Yet, having said this, there is still a way in which a certain primacy is entrusted to the husband. Once again the characteristic of *initiative* emerges.

The husband is, above all, *he who loves* and the wife, on the other hand, is *she who is loved*. One could even hazard the idea that the wife's submission to her husband, understood in the context of the entire passage of Ephesians (5:21-33), signifies above all the "experiencing of love." This is all the more so since this submission is related to the image of the submission of the Church to Christ, which certainly consists in experiencing his love.³⁹⁸

It is because of this love of the husband that any and all fear the wife might have in submitting herself to him is removed. As the Holy Father observes:

Love excludes every kind of subjection whereby the wife might become a servant or a slave of the husband, an object of unilateral domination. Love makes the husband simultaneously subject to the wife, and thereby subject to the Lord himself, just as the wife to the husband. The community or unity which they should establish through marriage is constituted by a reciprocal donation of self, which is also a mutual subjection. Christ is the source and at the same time the model of that subjection...³⁹⁹

The husband learns this model of initiative from Christ, who is "the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its savior" (Eph 5:23). His love for his bride, the Church, which is manifested on the cross in that act wherein he gives himself up for her, "is an image and above all a model of the love which the husband should show to his wife in marriage..."⁴⁰⁰ Christ is head, then, as Savior; he creates the body – "she [the

³⁹⁷ See *TB*, 309-310. The source of this mutual subordination, Pope John Paul II says, is *pietas* (*TB*, 309). By this word he means a "respect for holiness, for the *sacrum*." This "holy reverence" indicates the respect that each spouse owes the other as a person chosen by God to share in the divine life. "The mystery of Christ, penetrating their hearts, engendering in them that holy 'reverence for Christ' (namely *pietas*), should lead them to 'be subject to one another' – the mystery of Christ, that is, the mystery of the choice from eternity of each of them in Christ to be adoptive sons of God" (*TB*, 309).

³⁹⁸ *TB*, 320.

³⁹⁹ *TB*, 310.

⁴⁰⁰ *TB*, 316.

Church] receives from him all that through which [she] becomes and is his Body.”⁴⁰¹ He is head, then, as the one who forms the Church and builds her up. As head of the Church, his body, his gift of redemption penetrates into her.⁴⁰²

Since the husband’s headship is analogous to Christ’s headship, there are notable differences between them. For example, the husband is not his wife’s savior, nor is he the one who forms her or builds her up. Yet, despite these differences, there is a genuine likeness. As Christ took the initiative in giving himself to the Church, so too is the husband to take an initiative in loving his wife. Accordingly, as Christ was solicitous for the Church’s welfare, as he desired, appreciated and cared for her beauty, so too is the husband to act towards his wife.⁴⁰³

Within Ephesians 5:21-33, there is operating within the spousal analogy of Christ and the Church on the one hand and spouses on the other, a further analogy – the analogy of the head and the body.⁴⁰⁴ This image of head and body points out that the union that exists between them is “above all of an organic nature. To put it simply, it is the somatic union of the human organism.”⁴⁰⁵ In the Holy Father’s analysis, this analogy is one that seems to have been conceived by the author of Ephesians in “a more central manner” to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church than even the spousal analogy. However, this analogy of head and body is not one that operates on a level outside of or

⁴⁰¹ *TB*, 313.

⁴⁰² See *TB*, 313-314.

⁴⁰³ See *TB*, 319.

⁴⁰⁴ See *TB*, 314-318.

⁴⁰⁵ *TB*, 314-315.

even alongside of the spousal analogy. Rather, it operates *within* that analogy, lending further clarification and illumination to it.⁴⁰⁶ As John Paul II writes: “In the whole text of Ephesians (5:21-33)...the author speaks as if in marriage also the husband is the ‘head of the wife,’ and the wife ‘the body of the husband,’ as if the married couple formed one organic union.”⁴⁰⁷

However, this is not to say that in marriage, or in the relationship between Christ and the Church, that there are not two “distinct personal subjects.”⁴⁰⁸ In an organic union, the head makes up with the body one single subject, “an organism, a human person, a being.”⁴⁰⁹ This is not the case with Christ and the Church or with a husband and his wife. As the Pope observes: “There is no doubt that Christ is a subject different from the Church. However, in virtue of a particular relationship, he is united with her, as in an organic union of head and body. The Church is so strongly, so essentially herself in virtue of a mystical union with Christ. Is it possible to say the same thing of the spouses, of the man and woman united by the marriage bond?”⁴¹⁰ Operating within the marital relationship, whereby through consent two persons join their lives together, the author of Ephesians sees the analogy of the union of head and body. This analogy applies to marriage in a certain sense “in consideration of the union which Christ constitutes with the Church, and the Church with Christ. Therefore, the analogy regards, above all,

⁴⁰⁶ See *TB*, 315.

⁴⁰⁷ *TB*, 315.

⁴⁰⁸ See *TB*, 315, 316.

⁴⁰⁹ See *TB*, 315.

⁴¹⁰ *TB*, 315.

marriage itself as that union through which ‘the two become one flesh’ (Eph 5:31; cf. Gn 2:24).⁴¹¹

There is one further insight that is significant for understanding the role of the husband as head. The Pope makes this insight in his earlier audiences focusing on the theme of the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1 and 2.⁴¹² Here, the Holy Father writes, “It seems that the second narrative of creation has assigned to man ‘from the beginning’ the function of *the one who, above all, receives the gift* (cf. especially Gn 2:23).⁴¹³ In addition to the characteristic of *initiative*, then, the husband is the one to whom the gift of the woman is *entrusted*.⁴¹⁴

Certainly, given the understanding that the Pope has of the equality in dignity and worth of the woman, this “entrusting” of the woman to the man cannot be understood as though the man has a superior position. Rather, headship is to be understood, “from the beginning”, as having to do with caring for, looking after, and protecting. “‘From the beginning’ the woman is entrusted to his eyes, to his consciousness, to his sensitivity, to

⁴¹¹ See *TB*, 316. Again, we must keep in mind the greater dissimilarity that is operative within this analogy; for Christ is the one who himself washes and sanctifies the Church, whereas the husband is one with his wife in belonging to that bride of Christ and does not perform such a role for his wife. See *MD*, 27, *TB* 246-249, 252-254.

⁴¹² These audiences span the time from September 5, 1979 through April 2, 1980.

⁴¹³ *TB*, 71, italics mine. Earlier, the Pope had said, “Genesis 2:23-25 enables us to deduce that woman, who in the mystery of creation ‘is given’ to man by the Creator, is ‘received,’ thanks to original innocence. That is, she is accepted by man as a gift...At the same time, the acceptance of the woman by the man and the very way of accepting her, becomes, as it were, a first donation. In giving herself...the woman ‘rediscovers herself’ at the same time. This is because she has been accepted and welcomed, and because of the way in which she has been received by the man” (*ibid*).

⁴¹⁴ See also *MD*, 14; Paula Jean Miller, “The Theology of the Body: A New Look at *Humanae Vitae*,” *Theology Today* 57 (2001): 501-508, esp. 506.

his heart...In the mystery of creation, the woman was ‘given’ to the man.’⁴¹⁵ Again, this being “given” to the man is not in any way meant to indicate that the woman is the man’s “possession.” The woman is no *thing* but a *person* – a person created in the image and likeness of God, without whom the man is alone, unable to find fulfillment. The second narrative account of creation relates the creation and presentation of the woman by God to the man much as a father would present his daughter to a young man for marriage: “Here she is – my beloved daughter; care for her! Love her! She is my delight!”

By caring for the woman entrusted to him, the man will take an initiative in leading both of them to fulfillment.

On his part, in receiving her as a gift in the full truth of her person and femininity, man thereby enriches her. At the same time, he too is enriched in this mutual relationship. The man is enriched not only through her, who gives him her own person and femininity, but also through the gift of himself. The man’s giving of himself, in response to that of the woman, enriches himself. It manifests the specific essence of his masculinity which, through the reality of the body and of sex, reaches the deep recesses of the “possession of self.” Thanks to this, he is capable both of giving himself and of receiving the other’s gift.⁴¹⁶

Thus, a special obligation falls to the man to ensure that his relationship with the woman remains one of “mutual giving.”⁴¹⁷ “‘From the beginning’ man was to have been the guardian of the reciprocity of donation and its true balance.” The Pope’s analysis of the second account of creation

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ See *ibid.*

shows precisely man's responsibility in accepting femininity as a gift and in borrowing it in a mutual, bilateral exchange. To take from woman her own gift by means of concupiscence is in open contrast to that. The maintenance of the balance of the gift seems to have been entrusted to both. But a special responsibility rests with man above all, as if it depended more on him whether the balance is maintained or broken or even – if already broken – re-established.⁴¹⁸

Thus, from what the Holy Father writes we can see that one of the first things that headship means is *to care for the one entrusted to him*. While, certainly, both man and woman are to care for one another, there is still a way in which the man has a priority in this role, and, thus, a greater responsibility to ensure that not only the woman but the mutual relationship itself is protected.⁴¹⁹ Contrary to what some⁴²⁰ have argued, then, the Pope is saying that in Eden, *before the fall*, there was headship.⁴²¹

Summary

This chapter began by looking at the nature of authority in general, so as to come to a greater understanding of headship in particular. It was seen that authority is not the arbitrary imposition of one person's will upon another. Rather, authority is at the service

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.* For the implications of the Pope's thought here on Natural Family Planning and the importance of the husband taking an initiative in this process, see Shivanandan, "Feminism and Marriage," esp. 18-22.

⁴¹⁹ I am well aware that on several occasions John Paul II writes that all persons are entrusted to women. See, for example, *MD*, 30; *Christifideles Laici* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1988), 51. This, however, is not to be understood as a contradiction of his teaching regarding the entrusting of the woman to man. Rather, the reception of the gift of the woman from God by the man is what makes possible the conditions for the woman to receive the gift of human life that is entrusted in a particular way to her. As Schumacher writes, "The man's acceptance of her then becomes a 'first donation' enabling her to love in return." "The Prophetic Vocation of Women," 154.

⁴²⁰ See, for example, Merode, "aide," 331.

⁴²¹ What has come with the fall has been a tendency towards regarding the other (most often the woman) as unequal. I do not here wish to enter into a discussion of Gen 3:16 and the interpretation thereof. The Pope discusses this in some detail in *TB*, 120-130, and in *MD*, 9-10. See Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?*, 202-204, and notes therein.

of the other. Authority is not equal to power and coercion, but is at the service of freedom and helps others reach fulfillment. The ultimate authority is God, who does not wield his authority in an attempt to restrict his creation, but is intent on his creation, in the case of humanity, sharing in his own divine life. Jesus, “the image of the invisible God” (cf. Col 1:15), in his life, death, and resurrection, gives us the most visible image of authority, headship, and leadership. From Jesus, we clearly understand that all true authority and headship is servant authority and headship. The authority and headship of Jesus, then, is the “reference point” for all those who have been entrusted with positions of authority, including husbands. Only when his headship is in accord with Christ’s can a husband’s be considered genuine. As Christ’s headship and authority is at the service of the Church, so too is a husband’s headship to be at the service of his wife. “He [the husband] seeks to make his wife’s life radiant, full, beautiful. He seeks to have a wife who feels and knows she is fulfilled in every way.”⁴²² By properly understanding headship it becomes possible to see that it is not something that is antithetical to the teaching that within marriage there is to be a mutual subordination of the spouses to each other out of reverence for Christ.

Though there is no one exhortation entitled “The Dignity and Vocation of Men,” it still is possible to glean from the Pope’s writings and homilies some crucial insights enabling us to more accurately understand what it means for the husband or the man to be head. In reflecting on *Pastores dabo vobis*, *Mulieris dignitatem*, *Redemptoris custos*, “Letter to Families,” *Familiaris consortio*, and “the theology of the body,” the following insights emerge regarding the nature of headship. First, to be head is to be *at the service*

⁴²² Kraus, “Subjection,” 23.

of those under your authority; it requires making a detached, radical and reckless gesture of self-giving love to the other(s), even to the point of laying down one's life for the other(s). Second, and related, to be head is to exercise a *care for those entrusted* to you, all the more so when it is remembered that all men and women are equal in dignity and worth before God, and that each and every person has been personally chosen by God to become his adopted children and to share in the divine life. Involved in this care is the role of enabling those entrusted to you to develop fully, exercising their own gifts and talents and resources according to the way God intended. Third, to be head is to be a cause for stability and unity within the marriage (and the family).

In examining Pope John Paul II's thought on headship, the focus appears to be more on the nature of understanding what it means *to be* head, as opposed to articulating the things that a husband as head *does*. On a most basic level, this makes sense. Action follows being, and it is most important for a man, as a husband, to know what it means *to be* a husband before he can ever truly live, love, and serve like a husband should. Also, in writing as he has, the Pope leaves room for each husband to "enflesh" the teaching on headship according to his own unique gifts and personality.

Having said all this, however, several practical matters do emerge from what the Pope has said. For example, the nature of a husband's work – the what, where, and how much – must be evaluated in the light of his vocation. Furthermore, in matters of sexuality, how important it is for the man to take an active role, along with his wife, in family planning. Crucial here is the husband's acceptance of his wife in her entirety,

including her fertility. A further application of all that has been said regarding headship could be seen in a father's making sure that their children are being watched so that the wife and mother can have the time that she needs to be with God in prayer.

It is most important to remember that in saying all these things, it is by no means the case that the husband alone is responsible for all things in the marriage (or family). Such is not headship, but rather domination. In saying that there is a certain initiative that belongs to the husband one does not mean to indicate that the wife never takes the lead in matters regarding the marriage or the family. Such a view is not at all in mind. Instead, the teaching regarding headship demands that a husband look to Christ and his relationship with the Church and see therein his model to imitate and partake in. "The husband is, above all, *he who loves*, and the wife, on the other hand, is *she who is loved*."⁴²³

⁴²³ See *TB*, 320; see also *MD*, 29.

Conclusion

It has been argued that much of the discussion occurring in this day and age about men, women, marriage, sexuality, and other related issues, is not very illuminating. This is so, the argument continues, because the nature of the discussions is often political and interested in victory rather than in learning and understanding.⁴²⁴ With this in mind, it has been the intent of this work to try and make a very modest contribution to understanding the reasons that lay at the foundation of a very practical and pastoral issue: the mutual subordination of husband and wife within marriage.

My focus in this work has been at times more theoretical than practical; this is because I believe that more attention needs to be paid in this day and age to issues such as who a person *is*, who a husband *is*, who a wife *is*, and what marriage *is*. It is only after grappling with these very real questions that good, solid answers can be given to *what* a husband should *do* and *what* a wife should *do*. It will remain for a further work, then, to pull out the practical implications of the thought that has been proposed here.

In the first chapter, I started by looking at Eph 5:21-33. It was necessary to begin here because it is in his discussion of this text, and particularly of 5:21, that Pope John Paul II made his remarks about all submission within marriage being understood as a mutual submission (cf. *MD* 24). This is a text, however, that is widely believed by many Christians to be “out of touch” and oppressive towards the dignity of women. Because

⁴²⁴ See Leon R. Kass, “Man and Women: An Old Story,” *First Things* 17 (1991): 14.

this passage has been so infrequently preached upon and so poorly explained, there is among not a few Christians a suspicion of God's word revealed to us in Scripture. In the examination of the true meaning of several key words and phrases, however, it was seen that this text, when properly understood, is not at all a patriarchal treatise seeking to "keep women in their place." Nor is this a passage that exalts the man to some lofty place from upon which he is to be served. Instead, Eph 5:21-33 is a truly ennobling and dignified revelation of what a husband and wife are called to when they freely choose to exchange their consent and enter into a lifelong and exclusive union. Moreover, despite what some have claimed, Eph 5:21-33 is not at all a text that is akin to the teachings regarding the relationship between husband and wife that can be found among the first century neighbors of the Christians. The newness of the event that is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus fills this passage through and through.

In Chapter Two, my intent was to render the teaching of scripture, namely, "Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21), more intelligible through philosophical insights. By looking first of all at the fact that man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God, and all that this entails, it was seen that for the human person to reach perfection and to find fulfillment, he must resemble the One in whose image he has been made: God.

Though one must be cautious to the utmost when talking about the nature of God, the help of theologians and scholars, like Pope John Paul II, Balthasar, Scola, and Allen, helped to show that there is within the life of the Triune God a reckless exchange of love.

Thus, the human person created in that image will only be able to find fulfillment and perfection when he conforms to and participates in that model. Fulfillment for the human person, then, is found by making a sincere gift of self to another/others (cf. *GS* 24). In the context of the marriage relationship, this helps to explain that the teaching that there is to be mutual subordination between the husband and wife is not so much an external law or exhortation, but rather an internal one. The make-up of the human person demands that if there is to be fulfillment, a life of sincere giving must be embarked upon. For a man or a woman who is married, the most proper place for that life of giving is with his or her spouse.

In the final chapter, it was necessary to address the issue of headship, and to see how that is to be understood in light of the fact that there is to be mutual subordination between husband and wife. After first attempting to explain the right meaning of authority in general, I sought to argue that, following the model of Jesus, the only genuine authority is servant authority. A husband's headship, then, is not to be understood as indicating any superiority on his part. Rather, it is like a task that is entrusted to him as a steward. As head of his wife, the husband is expected to follow the model of Christ, who "first loved us" (1 Jn 5:19). To be head, then, to be the bridegroom, means to be the *initiator* in love.

In reading the Pope's teaching on mutual subordination, it might be the case that there are some who think that it is inconsistent with the previous teachings of the magisterium of the Church. For example, the teachings of recent popes, including Leo

XIII's *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, and Pius XI's *Casti Connubii*, have tended to emphasize the duty of the wife to be subordinate to her husband and the rights of the husband as head.⁴²⁵ However, Pope John Paul II's teaching is not something that is inconsistent with these earlier teaching. It is not at all the case that he is no longer saying to wives that they should not put themselves under their husband's loving care. Rather, the contribution of Pope John Paul II can rightly be understood as a genuine development of doctrine in this area, in large part made possible by his personalistic philosophy and the understanding of the human person that results from that philosophy. The teaching regarding mutual subordination, then, and the need to understand that *all* subordination within marriage must be understood as mutual, is not a rejection of previous papal teaching; it is something made in addition to it.⁴²⁶

On a more pastoral level, it might also be the case that the faithful, perhaps most especially married men and women, wonder whether the teaching regarding mutual subordination can really be enacted. Certainly, the fall of man and woman has left a huge wound in the man-woman/husband-wife relationship.⁴²⁷ However, Pope John Paul II is wont to emphasize that his teaching regarding the theology of the body is not something abstract; it is eminently pastoral and truly able to be lived out with the grace of Christ which is given to couples in the sacrament of matrimony.⁴²⁸ The redemption of Christ is

⁴²⁵ See especially Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, 13; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii*, 11, 26, 27.

⁴²⁶ For more, see Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, Vol II, 614-619.

⁴²⁷ See *MD*, 9-11; *TB*, 333-339.

⁴²⁸ The Pope refers to his teaching on the theology of the body as a "pedagogy." "Pedagogy aims at educating, setting before man the requirements, motivating them, and pointing out the ways that lead to their fulfillment." *TB*, 214.

not something that just affects our souls, leaving our bodies, attitudes, and relationships untouched.⁴²⁹ No, the redemption of Christ brings about a “real renewal”, a “re-creation”, of God’s original intent for man and woman.⁴³⁰ Through the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, marriage has been opened to the salvific action of God.⁴³¹ Husbands and wives, by virtue of the sacrament they have received, “participate in God’s own creative love.”⁴³² This love of God alive in each spouse individually and in their relationship together genuinely allows a husband and wife to lift themselves out of a relationship of mutual opposition and enter into one of mutual help.

⁴²⁹ See especially the section in *TB* on “Life According to the Spirit,” 191-261.

⁴³⁰ See *TB*, 341. See also *MD*, 11.

⁴³¹ See *TB*, 345.

⁴³² *TB*, 352.

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