

Gender: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

Some Thoughts on Femininity

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The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one’s eyes.) The real foundations of his inquiry do not strike a person at all....And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. ¹

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s words here apply to the man-woman difference: in the reality of marriage in its entirely self-evident and foundational character, as well as in its absolute centrality to human existence. Not long ago, the idea of having to *explain* them would have seemed absurd to most. ² This distinction between man and woman, the magnificent reality of romantic and spousal love, the permanent and devoted union of marriage for which this love yearns, and its happy “overflow” into the creation of a family, has so deeply structured our understanding of the world, and the human person, that it would never have occurred to us to think about the “why” behind them.

We Americans face a state of affairs relating to marriage and family that has forced us to “(lose) the innocence of taking man and woman for granted.” ³ We must now attempt to show why the divinely-instituted laws of marriage and family—which, until recently, was taken by all simply as a given—are binding not only for Christians, but hold true for everyone. There is, however, a certain difficulty in the task, since the “invention” of man and woman, and of marriage,

are precisely that: an invention proceeding, as it were, from God's creative imagination. That is, they cannot, in a mathematical sense, be shown to be necessary. A different system would have been possible—as indeed, some created, rational beings have no gender (angels), and do not enter into marriage. But, that God has invented the reality of marriage in no way implies that it is arbitrary or meaningless. On the contrary, there is a deep intelligibility underlying the division of humanity into two genders, and marriage as the unique union possible only between a man and a woman.

Some preliminary reflections on the nature and meaning of gender, generally speaking, are offered here as possible a groundwork for further considerations on the Church's teaching on marriage as founded on the union of man and woman. For only if we understand the metaphysical constitution of masculinity and femininity, and their centrality to the being of man and woman, will we be able to defend marriage against the current onslaught that would all but destroy it.

The creation of the human person as male and female is the most central feature of the visible world. It is also at the very center of God's plan for humanity. This plan originates within the being of God himself, and it is where we must begin if we are to discover the meaning of gender.

Gender and Its Primary Significance 4

For all the impressive knowledge of God to which pre-Christian philosophy attained, God reveals, in the New Testament, what was completely unimaginable for the Greeks: that God is love. Not only that God loves, which would have been absurd enough; but that God *is* love. How can this be? How can a being *be* love? This “mystery kept hidden through all the ages,” as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, is the mystery of the Trinitarian life. For if there is love, there is otherness; and the otherness cannot be only twofold, but must be threefold, so that not only the union of love would be represented, but also its fruitfulness. 5

But we must go further. It only makes sense to say that God *is* love if the persons within the Trinity not only exist in a relation of love, but somehow personify the elements that make up love. So, what are the fundamental constituents of love? They are, first, the gestures of *self-giving*, and second, the corresponding gestures of *receiving*. How is this found within the Trinity? We discover through theology that the first person of the Trinity is who he is by the very act of giving himself to the Son. The second person of the Trinity is who he is in the very act of receiving the Father. Divine science teaches that the persons are “subsistent relations.” But love is not yet complete; for love is not love if it is not “more than itself,” if this mutual exchange of persons is not fruitful. In God, this superabundance of love is eternally a new person: the Holy Spirit, who is sometimes called the “substantial love” between the Father and the Son. Thus, the plurality within God finds its meaning and origin in the reality of love. The eastern rite theologian Jean Corbon writes:

In the communion of the Blessed Trinity no person is named for himself. There is here neither “in itself” nor “for itself”: terms that among us are signs of barrenness and death. In the communion of the living God, the mystery of each person is to be for the other: “O! Thou!” 6

We must note here that all three persons, in their *act* of loving one another, perform the two gestures of giving and receiving. But in their own *being*, each personifies one of the three elements of love.

What does this have to do with the plan of God? By a marvelous invention, the specific character of each of the two gestures of love is translated into two ways of being a human person, in God's creation of humanity, into male and

female. It is important to emphasize that there is no masculinity or femininity as such in God. But the gestures of love that constitute the being of the Father and the Son are in some way communicated to the being of created, embodied persons. While men and women have a personal, human nature in common, this human nature finds two “modes” of existence in them. Let us explore this.

Though ordained to bodily being, masculinity and femininity are first and foremost spiritual realities. ⁷ We then come to the not-so-easy question of what characterizes each. At this point, we will avoid coming up with a list of aptitudes, tendencies, roles, or activities proper to men and women. This is because masculinity and femininity exist on a deeper level; they refer in the first instance to a quality of being. While it is difficult to capture everything that masculinity and femininity contain in their fundamental meaning, we can at least settle on the “keynote” ⁸ of each. In the case of masculinity, it is *spontaneity*, which is the technical term for “going out of oneself,” for “giving;” and in the case of femininity, *receptivity*. ⁹ Giving and receiving are personal acts, but in the human person, they have an analogy in the difference between gender. While man and woman both fully have a human nature—a point which must not be lost sight of—their distinctness lies in their possessing that human nature according to these two different “modes.” The man is a human person existing in the mode of spontaneity; the woman is a human person fashioned in the mode of receptivity. To continue with the analogy of music, we can say that the male person is an “articulation of human personhood along the theme of spontaneity,” ¹⁰ while the female is an articulation of human personhood along the theme of receptivity. Masculinity and femininity go to the very depth of the man’s and the woman’s nature, modifying each of its components: it “colors” their soul, permeates their bodily being on all levels, and “structures” their psyche. It also “informs” their individual personality—all this while leaving intact their common humanity.

Once again, it is important to keep in mind that we are not yet referring to any actions (“men give”; “women receive”) or to any rules (“men are supposed to give; women are supposed to receive”). Rather, gender is most fundamentally a “quality” of being. Before moving on to ask the question about the meaning of this division of humanity into gendered persons, we have to note the fact that gender, though having its origin in spiritual characteristics, is by its nature ordained to a bodily existence. Angels have no gender, because they lack any body. And second, we have to note that gender finds its culmination in sexuality. Masculinity and femininity achieve a special “crystallization” in the sphere of sex. ¹¹ The significance of this will emerge in the context of our next point.

So, what is the meaning of all of this? Why is humankind divided in this strange way? Reflecting on this division following a discussion of the Trinity inevitably leads the mind to a first conclusion: this division of the human person into “engendered, embodied persons” is a complementary duality. Far from implying hostility or opposition, masculinity and femininity rather evidence a “being-ordered-to” one another, a “being for” one another. And the relationship that is indicated is a relation of *love*: man and woman are called to make a gift of themselves to each other.

Furthermore, the body, in its masculine and feminine sexuality, discloses the vocation to a uniquely close and deep kind of love, a spousal love. Spousal love is distinguished from other loves by its unprecedented totality: the spouses give their very selves to one another. They do so in and through the mysterious and most intimate exchange of the conjugal act, which truly effects a unity of persons. It is here that we come upon the cornerstone of the argument for heterosexual marriage: The deep and total entrance of persons into one another that defines marriage, and the genuine oneness that this mutual entrance entails, is possible only on the basis of a complementarity on the level of the very being of the persons. While both spouses perform the *act* of giving and receiving to accomplish the unity, they can only truly “become one” because to the spontaneous mode of the husband’s being corresponds the receptive

mode of the wife's being. [12] No true, total, self-donation is metaphysically possible for human persons without this complementarity, this correspondence, on the deepest level of their constitution.

By virtue of the inherent generosity of love, this bodily union between the spouses finds its ultimate expression when it “overflows” into the coming into existence of a new human person. In this astonishing “invention” of God, the human person’s imaging of the Trinity takes on a measure we could not have imagined, had we not witnessed it. The love between two finite persons effects (or co-effects) nothing less than the creation of a third person. [13]

Pope John Paul II declared that this ordination of man and woman to each other reveals the most fundamental characteristic of the human person as such: the gift characteristic. The love to which man and woman are called concerns not only their unique spousal relationship, but reveals the universal vocation proper to every human person: to make a gift of himself to everyone that he encounters, and to receive as a gift every person that he encounters. Even though the kind of love they share is unique in its spousal quality, it nevertheless discloses the general vocation to love. But John Paul II goes farther: the ordination of man and woman towards spousal communion and the creation of a family is a witness to the world of the origin of creation in love. The relationship between husband and wife operates as a “sacrament” of the relationship between God and his creatures. In and through it, we discover that God is no “self-thinking thought” or “unmoved mover” of Aristotle. We discover that the condition of man is not the one that Heidegger describes, in which man is “chucked” (*geworfen*) into existence, knowing not whence; nor the one that Sartre experiences as a child—in which we are held in being as if by a thread, by a mercurial, arbitrary, angry God. Rather, the tender, total, unconditional, self-forgetful love between husband and wife is “...a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and therefore a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs.” [14] Finally, the unity between husband and wife also signals our vocation to enter into a communion of the most intimate kind with the Creator himself. John Paul II writes that the human person “(through his masculinity and femininity) becomes a visible sign of the economy of Truth and Love...” [15]

So there is something wonderful here: in a mysterious way the inter-gender relationship of man and woman as husband and wife exemplifies the interpersonal nature of the person as person, and further, the person’s supernatural vocation. If, then, we lose a consciousness of the meaning of masculinity and femininity, we put ourselves in danger of losing the consciousness of our origin in love, and of the universal vocation to live in love, both with man and with God.

Modernity is marked by the unprecedented loss of the true meaning of masculinity and of femininity. [16] What we are left with is either a kind of genderless-ness, [17] or with caricatures of masculinity and femininity. Let us briefly think about how we have arrived here, and what these caricatures are. In their original sense, masculinity and femininity denote other-orientation, and a fruitful abandonment of self. But there has arisen out of the fallen condition of the human person a parody of gender: the spontaneity of the masculine soul ceases to be a principle by which the man goes out of himself to serve, and becomes the energy he uses to turn in on his own gratification. The man is now a predator, consuming the world around him; to be “masculine” means to be rapacious and overpowering. [18] Ironically, however, ours is also an age of wimps: when masculinity fails to be realized in its truth, it also degenerates into its opposite. And these two kinds of masculine degeneracy can often be found coexisting in one person.

As for the receptivity of the feminine soul—in the woman’s self-centeredness—receptivity is transmuted into acquisitiveness, and this gives rise to two caricatures: the woman as the snatching harpy, and the woman as the soft, weak, self-preoccupied, passive creature. In this second caricature, femininity is confounded with one of its possible external expressions— with external beauty, external perfection, with being flawlessly groomed and made up. In fact,

however, as we will see, external beauty is only a physical analogy for genuine femininity, which in its true nature is a quality of the soul that is meant to radiate from within.

These caricatures cannot but deeply alter the relation between the sexes. (Note, by the way, the similarity between the two in their corrupted mode. There is not much of a difference between the predator and the harpy!) No longer a witness to love, gender becomes a puzzle at best, and at worst, implies a state of war. ¹⁹ In our culture, this takes on the form, especially, of grasping for sexual domination. More recently, we see this dissolution of gender in the phenomenon, and even idealization, of homosexuality. We are, then, not astonished to find that in this universe of parodied gender, both men and women are opposed to love and to life, which would make a claim on them. And a vicious cycle is at work in this matter: there is an important way in which man and woman discover—not to mention realize—their vocation through the presence of the other, so that as the image of each disappears in ever weakening contours, the chances of regaining their true sense becomes more remote.

The Three Dimensions of Gender, and in Them, Its Further Significance

Up to this point, we have only considered gender as a way of being. But as we well know, gender manifests itself in different ways. Three ways in which gender is expressed come to mind here. Each will be described and examined in turn. Then, the important question of whether or not we are able to generate them directly will be considered. This is an important issue because in our present drama of the lost meaning of gender, we want to know how we can exert ourselves in the quest to retrieve it.

First, there is the expression of gender in its deepest and most substantial sense. Gender in this sense does not express itself in any particular action, but as an “aura” that surrounds everything we do, a “quality” that is “superadded” to our acts. Though this is the deepest stratum of masculinity and femininity, its expression is difficult to conceptualize; it is a kind of “atmosphere” that radiates from the being, and all the actions of the person. Gender on this deep level is originally given in the act of creation; it is that by which we are men and women in the first place.

But just as we contribute to becoming fully persons through our own free acts, so we also contribute to the full flourishing of our masculinity and femininity. What God begins in creation, we must complete. So then we ask: are we able to directly generate masculinity/femininity on this level? I would strongly suggest that we cannot. This is because masculinity/femininity in its deepest sense is something that develops and grows in us as we become morally good, as we achieve virtue; and virtue consists in an orientation of our whole being towards giving what is due to the world around us. The development of genuine masculinity and femininity follows the law of the whole of personal existence: unless the seed fall to the ground and die, it will not bear fruit. Only in the self-forgetfulness of living for others do we become perfected, in our masculinity and femininity, as in our human nature and in our individuality. There are many women who do not have the more external expressions of femininity (which we will reflect on in a moment) but that are nevertheless deeply feminine because of their goodness and holiness. This is what we saw, for example, in Mother Teresa.

This is the level of masculinity and femininity that is the greatest gift to the world, witnessing most fully to the goodness and love of God, and acting most powerfully as a reminder of the universal vocation to love.

Second, masculinity and femininity also have concrete manifestations, both physical and spiritual. It is easiest to explain this level of gender through examples: we denominate as “feminine,” things such as beauty, in the physical realm, grace and gentleness in the spiritual realm; as “masculine,” things such as strength in the physical sphere, initiative in the spiritual. However, these realities are not the essence of femininity and masculinity in the strict sense, though they are often confused with it, but are only analogies of the deeper, spiritual reality. That is, they “point to” the

spiritual essence of masculinity and femininity, through their qualitative affinity with masculinity and femininity. Because they are not at the core of masculinity and femininity, they can easily coexist with the absence of genuine masculinity and femininity. But the absence of them in no way tells us that genuine masculinity or femininity is not present. Once again, think of Mother Teresa; she had a femininity that radiated through everything about her, which made her unspeakably beautiful. And yet, put her next to a Hollywood star, and she would fail the femininity test on every front.

[20] On the other hand, we have encountered evil women who are beautiful and graceful, and in this sense, “feminine.” Think of the mermaids luring sailors to their death with their beauty. But the true sense of femininity is not found in these women, and they repel us in their caricaturing of it.

Now we must ask: can we aim directly at its attainment? The answer is that to some extent we can. However, it is not always clear that it should be aimed at. Perhaps in some cases it should be, such as in the case of attire. [21] In some cases, though, it seems it definitely should not be aimed at, such as (for women) physical grace. Affecting feminine grace makes a woman truly artificial and inauthentic. This kind of thing must be received as a gift by the woman who has it and not be an object of preoccupation; and it should certainly not be aimed at if it is absent. But when appropriate, we should pay some attention to this dimension of femininity in our efforts to save it in its deeper form. For this dimension does in some way “herald” genuine femininity and acts as a salutary reminder in the external world of the deeper reality. It seems that, especially in raising or educating girls, the educator should keep an eye to fostering its presence in an appropriate way. However, one ends up with a sham femininity when one overemphasizes these externals—as our culture has done with a vengeance.

Some Specific Gifts of the Woman

We now note the third way in which masculinity and femininity express themselves. Masculinity and femininity give rise to certain specific tendencies in the person, which in turn give rise to certain capacities, and even provide a natural “head start” on the attainment of certain virtues. We will here shift to focusing specifically on the feminine nature.

Before we proceed, however, we must recall our earlier point that we are not only masculine or feminine, but persons and individuals as well. There are certain characteristics we possess on the basis of our humanity and on the basis of our individuality; and these, too, are a principle of activity within us. So it is important not to make gender absolute in its determination of a person’s characteristics. For example, on the basis of our personal nature, both men and women are required to give and to receive; we are also both called to acquire all the virtues. [22] Of our commonality, generally, Edith Stein writes:

The fact that all powers which the husband (as man) possesses are present in a feminine nature as well—even though they may generally appear in different degrees and relationships—is an indication they should be employed in corresponding activity. [23]

Our individual personality yet again provides us with its own set of qualities, gifts, and tendencies, not wholly determined by our gender. I am drawn to the discipline of philosophy, not because I am a human being, or because I am a woman, but because I am the particular individual that I am. This is why gender stereotypes can be very painful: gender is not universal in what it bestows on a person, and one experiences within oneself the primacy of one’s own individual being in one’s actions, interests, choices, and so on.

Finally, being a woman does not dictate any specific profession or activities as such. Edith Stein famously writes, “... there is no profession which cannot be practiced by a woman,” and “Only subjective delusion could deny that women

are capable of practicing vocations other than that of spouse and mother.” [24] And she maintains, as does John Paul II, that it is good for the feminine presence to leaven all professions.

At the same time, femininity tends to give rise to certain positive characteristics in the woman that are a gift to her and through which she is meant to make a gift of herself to those around her. These account for what John Paul II has called “the genius of woman.” These qualities primarily modify how the woman engages her field of activity, though they also often incline the woman to seek specific professions and activities. One author characterizes gender and how it operates in this way:

One might think of gender as a hue or cast to the soul. It is not a different set of capacities, but some element in virtue of which women are motivated to develop certain of the human capacities more easily, and men different ones ... this is a motivation, not a determination. [25]

If I were pressed to confine myself to naming one outstanding characteristic of the feminine soul, I would speak of the unique relationship to love, and therefore to the world of persons, that the woman has by a kind of natural endowment. The supreme vocation of both men and woman is the vocation to love. But femininity seems to bestow on the woman gifts that have an immediate and organic affinity with this vocation. The woman would seem to possess as a kind of “talent” (in the Biblical sense) for loving and for wanting to live in love. [26]

I would suggest that the woman finds herself with this gift because the receptivity that “colors” her way of being is itself already almost love. Now, while the spontaneity of self-giving is also essential to love, in creaturely existence, receptivity must be the foundation of love, its first “gesture.” All self-giving must be based on a prior response of unconditional acceptance of the other. Once again, every genuine love must fully contain both self-donation and reception of the other. Neither is it truly itself or complete without the other. In some sense, to receive the other is to give oneself, and to give oneself is to receive the other. But the two are nevertheless different dimensions of love. In the created world, we can speak of the “talents” that have an affinity with either masculinity or femininity as “modalities” of personal being that reflect these two dimensions of love. A unique relationship to the world of love, and therefore to persons as persons, is the talent related to the modality in which the woman’s person is fashioned.

Receptivity in its essence contains the openness to other persons that is a crucial prelude to love. It already implies the unconditional nature that is so central to love; the unreserved acceptance and affirmation of the other that are the life-giving elements in love have an essential affinity with receptivity. These qualities, in turn, require sensitivity and attentiveness. And so receptivity is closely allied with the contemplative ethos of love, by which it does not, in the first instance, exhort, does not reprove, does not “call out,” but simply accepts and rejoices in the beloved. All of this is diametrically opposed to use—that approach to another which underlies every wrong and destructive attitude towards the human person. Receptivity presents itself to us as the polar opposite of use.

As we know, love alone stands fully at the service of the person. The woman has the special privilege of keeping the paramount importance of love vibrantly—even if discreetly—present in whatever sphere she finds herself. In doing this, she preserves the truth that in all of our earthly endeavors, the human person must remain at the center. Whether in business, education, science, or technology—nothing has meaning if it does not safeguard the dignity of the human person, respect his rights, and contribute to his flourishing. And it is only love that keeps the person at the center of our vision. [27]

Our final question remains: How are these gifts of the woman realized? In spite of the pathological modern mindset, in all genuinely personal action that is authentic and not distorted, and in all action that leads to our flourishing, the

person paradoxically does not focus on himself, on “expressing himself,” or “realizing” himself. It is Our Lady who is the model for the woman who desires to become genuinely feminine: In *Letter to Women* John Paul II writes:

The Church sees in Mary the highest expression of the “feminine genius,” and she finds in her a source of constant inspiration. Mary called herself the “handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). Through obedience to the word of God she accepted her lofty yet not easy vocation as wife and mother in the family of Nazareth. Putting herself at God’s service, she also put herself at the service of others: a service of love. 28

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1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, #129.
 2. When we hear the proposal to open the institution of marriage even to homosexual couples we are first at a loss how to respond, for something utterly fundamental to our understanding of human existence has been called into question.” John Crosby, “John Paul II on the Complementarity of Man and Woman” in *The Church, Marriage, and the Family* (St Augustine’s Press: South Bend. 2007, pp. 41-52), p. 41
 3. Crosby, “John Paul II on the Complementarity of Man and Woman”, p. 41
 4. The term “gender” is used in different ways by different authors. I will use it in the sense whereby it refers to the whole set of realities (both spiritual and physical) that come to mind when we think of the difference between man and woman.
 5. While the truth about the Trinitarian life of God is something which could only be discovered through God’s own revelation of himself, once it was known, theologians and philosopher set about showing the consummate reasonability of this reality. See for example Richard of St. Victor’s rational arguments, based on the nature of love, for the three-ness of divine persons in Book III of *The Trinity*, c. 1.
 6. *The Wellspring of Worship* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2005), p. 30.
 7. I am aware that this position of the fundamentally spiritual nature of masculinity and femininity is not universally held; some say that they are rooted exclusively in the bodily dimension of man and woman. But my position is sufficiently in the mainstream for it not to need justification in the present context; the view was held, for example, by thinkers such as John Paul II, as seen especially in his writings on woman, and Edith Stein, especially in her *Essays on Woman*.
 8. This idea of music as written in different keys to express by analogy the difference of gender is suggested by Damian Fedoryka in his article “On Allegory and Metaphysics in the Language of Sexuality” in *The Church, Marriage, and Family* (St. Augustine’s Press: South Bend, 2007), pp. 293-302. The structure of a symphony is found in every particular symphony; the key in which a symphony is written bestows each particular symphony with its own special character and “aura”.
 9. One finds this characterization of masculinity and femininity, even if expressed in slightly different terms, in many respected authors – such as for example Karl Stern, Gertrude von le Fort, Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand. This “keynote” of receptivity must not be confused with *passivity* – which has often happened in the traditional articulation of the matter. Passivity is the opposite of activity. Activity, on the other hand, encompasses both spontaneity and receptivity. That is, receptivity is a type of act, and is therefore as much

opposed to passivity as is spontaneity, even though in a different way. And as we've noted: spontaneity and receptivity are *complementary* to each other, while spontaneity and passivity are *opposites*.

10. Dr. Damian Fedoryka's formulation, in conversation.
11. It is one of the errors of our age to reduce gender to sexuality – which we could call the “sexualization of gender”. While gender finds a unique concentration in the sphere of sex, it is by no means reducible to sex; indeed, the sphere of sex must be imbued with the spiritual characteristics of gender to achieve its proper realization.
12. It should be noted that while masculinity and femininity are reflections of the two gestures of love, as found within the Trinity, the spousal relationship between man and woman is structured on the model of the union between Christ and the Church. See *Gaudium et spes*, par. 48.
13. Here we catch a glimpse of why the special imaging of the Trinity requires a body: a contingent person cannot create from nothing, and cannot share its soul. But it can communicate something of the matter of its bodily being.
14. *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Books and Media: Boston, 2006), 14:4.
15. *Theology of the Body* 19:5. We must marvel at the fact that God not only invites us into *some* union with Himself, but into the uniquely intimate union which is *spousal* – in and through our membership in His Bride the Church. We have no evidence that angels, for all their glory, are called to this unique kind of relationship with the creator.
16. Already in 1952, Simone de Beauvoir wrote: “Many American women particularly are prepared to think that there is no longer any place for woman as such; if a backward individual still takes herself for a woman, her friends advise her to be psychoanalyzed and thus get rid of this obsession.” *The Second Sex* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1993), Introduction.
17. Consider the title of Germaine Greer's “call to battle”, *The Female Eunuch*.
18. We find a hint of this dynamic spoken of in Genesis, where we are told that Eve's punishment after the fall consists very specifically in her desire for her husband being met with his domination of her.
19. Simone de Beauvoir famously insists on an essential opposition existing between man and woman: “It is easy to see that the duality of the sexes, like any duality, gives rise to conflict.” *Second Sex* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1993), Introduction.
20. Apparently Edith Stein was, by natural endowment, quite masculine in these externals. But it is recorded that when she spoke, when one saw her “in action,” she exuded the deepest feminine grace and beauty.
21. While I do not belong to the generation scandalized by the idea of women wearing trousers, I find Chesterton's amusing statement still applicable if modified to fit our present-day cultural sensibility: “It is highly typical of the rabid plagiarism which now passes everywhere for emancipation, that a little while ago it was common for an ‘advanced’ woman to claim the right to wear trousers; a right about as grotesque as the right to wear a false nose.” G.K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (Sheed & Ward: New York, 1956), p. 111
22. And, of course, the virtues of each will have the “hue” or “quality” of masculinity or femininity, just as they will also bear the unique quality of each particular person's individuality.
23. *Essays on Woman* (trans. Freda Mary Oben. ICS Publications: Washington, DC, 1996), p. 80.
24. *Essays on Woman*, p. 49.

25. Sarah Borden Sharkey, "Edith Stein and John Paul II on Women" www.crvp.org/book/Series01/I-35/chapter-12.htm.
26. This idea is central to both Edith Stein and John Paul II's writings on woman.
27. Cardinal Ratzinger notes both that all persons are called to love, but also that the woman witnesses to this call in a special way: "It is appropriate however to recall that the feminine values {related to 'the capacity for the other'} mentioned here are above all human values: the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible. It is only because women are more immediately attuned to these values that they are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values. But, in the final analysis, every human being, man or woman, is destined to be 'for the other'." *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Women in the Church and in the World*: www.vatican.va..., par. 14
28. *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women* www.vatican.va...

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Dr. Maria Fedoryka is associate professor of philosophy at Ave Maria University. She works in the field of the philosophy of love, focusing on its role at the center of the relationship between God and creation, and on its meaning for human existence, especially in marriage, family and sexuality. Among her publications are the popular booklet *The Special Gift of Women for God, the Family and the World* published by the Catholic Truth Society in England, and the scholarly article on the teaching of *Humanae vitae* in the American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly titled *Finis superabundant Operis: Refining an Ancient Cause for Understanding the Spousal Act*.

Comments

Stephen Morrissey says:

December 14, 2012 at 9:21 am

This was a really excellent article by Maria Fedoryka. I wish, however, that she would write an article about how gender pertains to the issue of women and the priesthood. I think she would do a great job with that. The priest acts in the person of Christ, who is a man and who is the Bridegroom of the Church, but there must be more to the theology here. What is it? There is more to the "Bridegroom" aspect than symbolism and semantics. Is there something exclusive in maleness that relates to priesthood? Maria, get busy!