

A DISORDERED VIEW OF MANHOOD AND ITS EFFECT ON THE IDEA OF WOMANHOOD

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John Paul II in his book entitled *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* states:

“A child conceived in its mother’s womb is never an unjust aggressor; it is a defenseless being that is waiting to be welcomed and helped.

It is necessary to recognize that, in this context, we are witnessing true human tragedies. Often the woman is the victim of male selfishness, in the sense that the man, who has contributed in the conception of the new life, does not want to be burden with it and leaves the responsibility to the woman, as if it were “her fault” alone. So, precisely, when the woman more needs the man’s support, he proves to be cynical egoist, capable of exploiting her affection or weakness, yet stubbornly resistant to any sense of responsibility for his own action. [...].

Therefore, in firmly rejecting “pro choice” it is necessary to become courageously “pro woman,” promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone.”¹

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Treshold of Hope*, V. MESSORI, ed., Toronto,

Introduction

John Paul II implies that it is precisely the irresponsibility of men that lies at a disordered perspective of manhood. Men take advantage of women's sensitivity and self-giving attitude and present them with a so-called "liberation" from their womanhood and motherhood through various physical or pharmaceutical contraceptive's barriers and failing these measures, abortion.

Some of the most extremist feminist movements have embraced this perspective in contending that their true liberation is manifested in sexual freedom without natural consequences. In this way, they play into the hands of the disordered man. The result is devastating. Women, and in many cases cooperate with men, in becoming sexual objects. This in turn leads to more subtle forms of exploitation, where women are promoted as sex objects when their naked bodies become the main point of reference in advertising, fashion, sports and other entertainment industries. It also opens the door to lucrative "industries" of exploitation: pornography, prostitution and human trafficking.

1. The Distortion of Manhood

In *Mulieris Dignitaten*, para. 10, John Paul II emphasizes that the woman who is a subject can never "*become the 'object' of 'domination' and male 'possession'.*" However, "[b]urdened by hereditary sinfulness, they [the man and woman] bear within themselves the constant "*inclination to sin*", the tendency to go against the moral order which corresponds to the rational nature and dignity of man and woman as persons."

The distorted vision of manhood, however, does just this; it promotes woman as objects and there are many examples of this. For example, in 1945, Bernard Nathanson, then a medical student,

Alfred A. Kropf, 1994, pp. 206-207. (Emphasis in the original)

a at the instigation of his father and with his father's 500 Canadian dollars, facilitated the abortion of his pregnant girlfriend living in Montreal at the time. In the words of Nathanson, writing some 50 years later: "This was the first of my seventy-five thousand encounters with abortion."² The most striking aspect of the story is that young Bernard and Ruth, his girlfriend, were very much in love but they both accepted Mr. Nathanson Senior's proposal. Bernard's vivid recollections of that particular day, as he recounts it many years later, clearly indicate that this particular event deeply marked him, and that he was clearly sorry for facilitating the abortion of his child. At the time, he did not even accompany Ruth to undergo the abortion because she insisted he not accompany her so he would not jeopardize his future medical career. At the time, abortion was a crime that carried a jail term for the abortionist and accomplices. Unsurprisingly, the relationship of Bernard and Ruth ended with the life of the child.³

Since accepting the organizers' invitation to this wonderful Conference, my attention has been turned to finding more contemporary examples. In this regard, two media reports are directly on point. One concerns a long letter written by a woman to the editor of the newspaper in Montreal called *La Presse*. The letter was published in February 2008. The female author recounts that while cohabiting with a man, she became pregnant and desired to give birth to their child. But the man convinced her that the timing was not right. He proposed an abortion and promised to marry her at a later date and to have children with her. She accepted these terms and underwent the abortion. Shortly afterwards, he abandoned her. To this day she regrets her act.

The second event concerns a popular news item in the Italian media. In mid May 2008, when I was in Rome teaching a seminar

² Bernard N. NATHANSON, M.D., *The Hand of God, A Journey from Death to Life by the abortion Doctor Who Changed His Mind*, Washington, D.C., Regnery Publisher Inc., 1996, p. 55.

³ See *Id.*, pp. 54-58.

course at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, the country was buzzing about the murder of a teenage girl in a small village. A surveillance camera in the place where her body was found recorded the images of three teenage boys leaving the building. The police investigation later discovered that each boy had been enjoying promiscuous relations with her. The police learned that when the girl became pregnant, she announced the fact to all three and conceded that she did not know which one was the father. They responded by killing her.

These are just some examples of how dysfunctional men manipulate woman. They bring alive the words in Genesis as they relate to women: **"He shall rule over you."** They also point to the effects on such men as expressed by Pope John Paul II: "For whenever man is responsible for offending a woman's personal dignity and vocation, he acts contrary to his own personal dignity and his own vocation." (MD, no. 10)

2. The Distortion of Womanhood

To sum up what has been said so far, dysfunctional men deny their own anthropology as based on "the "image and likeness" of God, which is the foundation of biblical anthropology." (MD 9) Through a disordered view of manhood, usually manifested as a form machismo, they develop strategies that serve their own selfish desires which include debasing the loving disposition of women and their spirit of service. Unfortunately, many women are manipulated and accept the propositions of such men that run contrary to the women's very nature. The distorted man, in fact, becomes a predator upon the receptive disposition of women.

John Paul II discusses how this all relates to the loss of the fundamental equality between man and woman. He states:

Therefore when we read in the biblical description the words addressed to the woman: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16), we discover a break and a constant threat precisely in regard to this "unity of the two" which

corresponds to the dignity of the image and likeness of God in both of them. But this threat is more serious for the woman, since domination takes the place of "being a sincere gift" and therefore living "for" the other: "he shall rule over you". This "domination" indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the "unity of the two": and this is especially to the disadvantage of the woman, whereas only the equality resulting from their dignity as persons can give to their mutual relationship the character of an authentic "communio personarum". While the violation of this equality, which is both a gift and a right deriving from God the Creator, involves an element to the disadvantage of the woman, at the same time it also diminishes the true dignity of the man. Here we touch upon an extremely sensitive point in the dimension of that "ethos" which was originally inscribed by the Creator in the very creation of both of them in his own image and likeness. (MD 10)

Professor Karl Stern also takes up the topic of equality but notes how it has been interpreted as sameness. In his insightful book *The Flight from Woman*, he devotes a chapter to "Womanhood" and presents a comprehensive analysis from a diversity of perspectives and includes an important point. "Since the French Revolution and the rise of the feminist movement, the cry for *equality* has changed into an assertion of *sameness*. Any view of dissimilarity smacked suspiciously of injustice. It is characteristic of our time that the word "discrimination" which originally means "sorting out," has often acquired the meaning of hate, and in works like those of Simone de Beauvoir and others any attempt at making *distinctions* is branded as an act of *discrimination* in the derogatory sense."⁴

The notion of "equality" has been tied to women's human rights. Certainly women have been deprived of civil rights in many Legal Systems. One need only consider the French Civil Code in which married women was considered an incapable person. It is well

⁴ K. STERN, *The Flight from Woman*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965, p. 14.

documented that this was a personal decision of Napoleon precisely because he was not able to "control" his wife Josephine.⁵ Similarly, in the Anglo–American Legal System, the interpretation of the biblical *erunt duo in carne una*, was that this one was the husband.⁶ While the struggle of women to obtain the full recognition of their human rights (as authentically defined) is totally justified, it should not lead women to mimic disordered men who encourage them to abandon their femininity.

Again in his apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul II gives us the proper parameters:

In our times the question of "women's rights" has taken on new significance in the broad context of the rights of the human person. *The biblical and evangelical message sheds light on this cause, which is the object of much attention today, by safeguarding the truth about the "unity" of the "two", that is to say the truth about that dignity and vocation that result from the specific diversity and personal originality of man and woman. Consequently, even the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words "He shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16) must not under any condition lead to the "masculinization" of women. In the name of liberation from male "domination", women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine "originality". There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not "reach fulfilment", but instead will *deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness*. [...] The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different. (MD, 10)*

Clearly this is the proper approach to the disordered view of manhood which in turn has provoked distortions in the perspective of womanhood. It is the selfishness of the dysfunctional man that is

⁵ Cf. E. CAPARROS, *Les lignes de force de l'évolution des régimes matrimoniaux en droits comparé et québécois*, Montreal, PUM, 1975, pp 330-31; R. PÉROUD, *La femme au temps des cathédrales*, Paris, Stock, 1980, pp. 233-235.

⁶ Cf. E. CAPARROS, *Les lignes de force...*, pp. 19-25.

taken up by the woman as evidenced in rejection of her maternity, which in turn leads to numerous social problems.

Abandoning femininity, as Stern illustrated in his book, would mean the masculinization of women and might even lead to the feminization of men. In response, John Paul II offers a clear path for a healthy masculinity and femininity in his discussion of mutual and reciprocal "self-gift" of the spouses:

This statement in Genesis 3:16 "*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*" is of great significance. It implies a reference to the mutual relationship of man and woman *in marriage*. It refers to the desire born in the atmosphere of spousal love whereby the woman's "sincere gift of self" is responded to and matched by a corresponding "gift" on the part of the husband. [...] A human being, whether male or female, is a person, and therefore, "the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake"; and at the same time this unique and unrepeatable creature "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self". (MD 10, GS 24)

He gives a deeper reflection of self-gift within the context of the New Covenant:

At the beginning of the New Covenant, which is to be eternal and irrevocable, there is a woman: the Virgin of Nazareth. It is a *sign* that points to the fact that "in Jesus Christ" "*there is neither male nor female*" (Gal 3:28). In Christ the mutual opposition between man and woman — which is the inheritance of original sin — is essentially overcome. "For you are all *one* in Jesus Christ", Saint Paul will write (*ibid.*). These words concern that original "unity of the two" which is linked with the creation of the human being as male and female, made in the image and likeness of God, and based on the model of that most perfect communion of Persons which is God himself. (MD 11)

Only in this way, can society move away from the problems posed by the male predator and toward the recognition that men and

women are made in the image and likeness of God and called to union and collaboration. In other words, only in this way can men and women move to the realm of love, as defined by one contemporary saint: "To love is to cherish one thought, to live for the person loved, not to belong to oneself, happily and freely with one's heart and soul to be subjected to another will ... and at the same time one's own."⁷ This could be considered as the quintessential manifestation of the sincere gift of self and the touch stone of the Civilization of Love.

Conclusion

It clear that building a new culture that respects the Christian anthropology of men and women is not an easy one. But this should not prevent us from participating in this venture. I take great solace from the fact that the first Christians confronted the moral depravity of the Roman Empire with far less means than we have today and they changed the world! Let me conclude with the words of Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of the International congress on woman and men held in Rome last February:

A renewed anthropological study is certainly necessary based on the great Christian tradition, which incorporates new scientific advances and, given today's cultural sensitivity, in this way contributes to deepening not only the feminine identity but also the masculine, which is often the object of partial and ideological reflections. Faced with cultural and political trends that seek to eliminate, or at least cloud and confuse, the sexual differences inscribed in human nature, considering them a cultural construct, it is necessary to recall God's design that created the human being masculine and feminine, with a unity and at the same time an original difference and complimentary.

[...] There are places and cultures where women are discriminated against or undervalued for the sole fact of being women, [...] where acts of violence are consummated in regard to women, making them the object of mistreatment and of exploitation in advertising and in

⁷ St. Josemaria ESCRIVA, *Furrow*, Manila, Sinag-Tala Publishers, n. 797.

the consumer and entertainment industry. Faced with such grave and persistent phenomena the Christian commitment appears all the more urgent so that everywhere it may promote a culture that recognizes the dignity that belongs to women, in law and in concrete reality.⁸

Thank you.

Montreal, December 30, 2008

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Participants in the International Convention on the Theme "Woman and Man, the **Humanun** in its Entirety," Clementine Hall, 9 February 2008, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20080209_donna-uomo_en.html.

See also Discorso alla Curia Roman, Clementine Hall, 22 December, 2008, n. 1, "[...] What is necessary is a kind of ecology of man, understood in the correct sense. When the Church speaks of the nature of the human being as man and woman and asks that this order of creation be respected, it is not the result of an outdated metaphysic. It is a question here of faith in the Creator and of listening to the language of creation, the devaluation of which leads to the self-destruction of man and therefore to the destruction of the same work of God. That which is often expressed and understood by the term "gender", results finally in the self-emancipation of man from creation and from the Creator. Man wishes to act alone and to dispose ever and exclusively of that alone which concerns him. But in this way he is living contrary to the truth, he is living contrary to the Spirit Creator. The tropical forests are deserving, yes, of our protection, but man merits no less than the creature, in which there is written a message which does not mean a contradiction of our liberty, but its condition. The great Scholastic theologians have characterised matrimony, the life-long bond between man and woman, as a sacrament of creation, instituted by the Creator himself and which Christ – without modifying the message of creation – has incorporated into the history of his covenant with mankind. [...]" [unofficial translation] original Italian at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/december/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20081222_curia-romana_it.html