

A Symposium on *THE WOMAN QUESTION*

In response to reader requests, FAITH & REASON approached several scholars with invitations to write something on the so-called "woman question." We were aware, of course, that no one author could do justice to the entire matter, but we felt that certain outstanding Christian thinkers might be able to present sensitive insights which would be valuable to our readers in both developing a deeper understanding of the issues involved and stimulating further discussion. The results expressed here, then, do not purport to be the final determinations of studies designed to lay the issue to rest. However, each author does draw on his or her special area of expertise in approaching an important aspect of the problem (see also F&R 1:3, Fr. R. Barwig, The Consecrated Woman . . .).

In the first selection, psychologist John Hammes answers a fundamental question: precisely what are the basic psychological differences between men and women, if any? Dr. Hammes reviews the relevant findings, but he is careful to conclude that the larger question of what roles women should play cannot be answered on the basis of psychology alone.

In the second article, philosopher Ronda Chervin reflects on the most talked about aspect of the woman question, the role of wife and mother. Beginning with a clear statement of her own experience, Dr. Chervin goes on to suggest a basic philosophical context within which a married woman might make decisions about her feminine priorities.

Implicit in all this is the need for a more fully developed theology of the woman. In the third selection, Fr. Owen Bennett, O.F.M., Conv. begins to fill that need. Basing his reflections on Scripture, Fr. Bennett notes the development in the female role from Creation to Christ and suggests that the feminine mission is to open out the rich life of the private sector into a renewal of the entire world.

Psychological Sex Differences

by JOHN A. HAMMES

“The feminine revolution must now complete the proletarian revolution, just as the proletarian revolution has consolidated the bourgeois revolution, which, in turn, was a consequence of the philosophical revolution.” This one-hundred-year old prophesy is attributed to the philosopher, Auguste Comte. The feminist movement has indeed emerged to the forefront in contemporary society, and women are actively reassessing their roles in the United States and other countries as well. The origins of the women’s liberation movement have been adequately presented elsewhere. In psychology, one effect of feminism has been a renewed interest in the psychology of sex differences, attested to by the publishing of many works on this topic, chiefly by women. The purpose of the present article is to summarize findings of psychologists and other researchers on the psychological differences between males and females. Studies on sex differences are very extensive; we shall here present but an overview.

Investigators of sex differences usually study younger persons, in the effort to determine biological differences relatively uninfluenced by enculturation. Therefore, many studies deal with boys and girls rather than men and women.

First, let us consider some popular ways in which boys and girls purportedly differ, but for which there is lack of confirmatory evidence. According to Maccoby and Jacklin,¹ it is not true that: a) girls are more social than boys; b) girls are more suggestible; c) girls have lower self-esteem; d) girls are better at rote learning; or, e) girls lack achievement motivation.

How do girls and boys, men and women, really differ? We shall consider the evidence relating to perceptual-motor abilities, cognitive abilities, and general personality factors. In the area of perceptual-motor research, it has been found that males excel females at pursuit tracking, repetitive tapping, and maze learning. Males have faster reaction-time. Too, males are better than females on visual space perception tasks, which involve the ability to grasp space relations as they change in space. On the other hand, females do better than males in tasks requiring fine hand movements, and in those involving clerical skill.²

In cognitive skills, boys are better than girls in mathematics. They also perform better in science, engineering, and in tasks requiring mechanical aptitude. Males also tend to have an analytical cognitive approach while females tend to show a global cognitive approach. The former approach is called a field-independent one and the latter approach is characterized as field-dependent. A field-independent approach involves the ability to experience items as discrete from their backgrounds, as demonstrated in the Embedded Figures Test. Field-dependent individuals cannot overcome the embedding context, lacking the required analytical ability. On the other hand, girls excel boys in verbal ability, *e.g.*, vocabulary and verbal fluency, and have fewer speech and reading problems.

In the area of general personality differences, most researchers are agreed that males are more physically aggressive than females, a finding observed cross-culturally. This characteristic is also apparently associated with greater male authority and dominance. According to some researchers, the patriarchy is a pure myth and has never existed.⁴

There are also differences in the ways men and women succeed or fail in their adjustment to pressures in society.⁵ With regard to childhood behavior disorders, boys, in contrast to girls: a) are more autistic in the ratio of three or four to one; b) are more hyperactive; c) are runaways more frequently; d) have more overanxious and withdrawal reactions; e) stutter more, in a ratio of four or five to one; and, f) in later years outnumber females in nail biting. In the area of neurotic behavior, hypochondriasis and neurasthenia are found more often in females. In the area of psychosomatic or somatization disorders, it appears that ulcers are more common among men, whereas rheumatoid arthritis and migraine are more frequent among women. Anorexia nervosa, characterized by severe loss of appetite and weight, is more common among females. In syphilitic disorders, the neurological damage that develops in general paresis has been found to be greater in men than in women. In studies of depressive behavior, apparently more females than males attempt suicide, but the success in fatal attempts is higher for males. Involutional melancholia, occurring at the climacteric or change of life, is three times more frequent with women. In the area of antisocial behavior, the majority of delinquents appear to be males, although the rate of increase of delinquent behavior is much greater for females. For crime in general, eighty percent of juvenile and adult offenders are males.

In regard to such sex differences that have been fairly well established, three questions may be asked. To what may the differences be attributed? How significant is the difference? What is the applied value of the finding?

First, what are the causal factors that explain psychological sex differences? They may be reduced to two primary factors, biological and socio-cultural. If a sex difference emerges very early in infancy or childhood, and if it is found cross-culturally, the researcher usually attributes it to biological factors. Again, if the administration of male or female sex hormones affects the manifestation of the behavior under question, this is evidence for biological sex difference. It seems that aggressiveness as predominantly characteristic of males is a trait that meets these three criteria.⁶ On the other hand, if a particular behavior is not consistently different between males and females across cultures, it is concluded that the behavior has been learned, acquired, or imprinted on the individual. An example would be political interest and involvement. Or, within a particular culture, there may be contradictory research findings on sex differences, as with recent studies of fear, timidity, and compliance.⁷ In such cases, it may be that the research data is biased by invalid or unreliable measuring instruments, or possibly the difference found is itself restricted to the sample drawn and therefore differs from samples drawn from other experimental populations.

How significant are those sex differences that are generally accepted as valid? Significance can be interpreted in two ways, statistical significance and practical significance. Statistical significance refers to the reliability of a found difference, and is stated in probability terms. An acceptable level of probability in psychological research is .05, which would mean that the probability of the difference as due to chance (random sample fluctuations) is but five times in one hundred, or very low. Therefore, if a difference between groups was statistically significant at this level, the researcher would conclude it was a real difference, that is, not due to chance but rather to differences in the nature of the groups under study. By contrast, practical significance involves the question, "So what?" For example, boys may be superior to girls on a pursuit rotor task, but the practical import of this finding would be restricted to hiring the best individual on a job requiring such skill, and today machines rather than people very likely handle tasks relating to this skill. Again, girls show greater verbal fluency than boys, yet from a practical viewpoint, this difference has not resulted in any superior female production of great literary works.

Even with differences that are both statistically significant and practically significant, it must be remembered that these are average differences, and that the distributions of the individual scores of the two groups may considerably overlap. For example, although males are on the average more aggressive than females, there are certainly many individual females who are more aggressive than the average male, and many individual males who are less aggressive than the average female.

The third question relates to the applied value of the findings. The implications of sex differences for shaping educational practices, societal goals, and the modification of sex roles are debatable and controversial. Even though males are more aggressive than females, for example, should little girls be reared to be passive and compliant? Because males appear to be more dominant, should women be kept out of roles in power politics? These and similar questions are related to a deeper question, which is, Are sex differences intentional? That is, do sex differences serve some kind of purpose in the order of things? And even if some sex roles and sex differences are natural, are we obliged to respect and preserve such differences, or may we eradicate them as a matter of personal choice? For example, homosexuality has been removed from the "sexual deviation" list by the American Psychiatric Association and is now merely considered different behavior. In the fashion world, "unisex" dominates the scene. Again, will the traditional father-mother structured family endure? Some sociologists foresee its demise, to be succeeded by the commune family structure. Even the natural means of reproduction has been challenged by the prediction that cloning will someday be the primary means of perpetuating a new human species.

The answer to these and related questions will differ in accordance with the various interpretations given the roles of man and woman in the scheme of things. Evolutionary atheism would advocate complete freedom to manipulate sex differences, whether genetic or cultural, in whatever direction society might choose. The traditional Judeo-Christian perspective would see distinct sexual roles delineated in Biblical revelation as divinely ordained. Which of these or other perspectives ought to be followed involves analysis beyond the purpose of the present paper, which is to present findings bearing on the question of psychological sex differences alone.

The Christian Wife and Mother

by RONDA CHERVIN

The contemporary feminist movement has stirred up a great deal of controversy about the nature of woman, especially concerning the question of the compatibility of her role as wife and mother with other commitments. The purpose of this article will be to uncover some of the philosophical

presuppositions which underlie popular discussion of this topic in the hope of arriving at some viable principles of Christian feminism.

Before attempting to delineate the fundamental commitments of the Christian wife and mother, I ought to clearly state something of my own personal development with regard to the roles of wife, mother, and career-woman. Readers have the right to analyze any point of view expressed on such a personal topic in light of the equally personal history of the author:

I got married while half-way through studying for my Ph. D. in philosophy. At first I was so enchanted with motherhood that I could not conceive of ever going back to school. When my twin daughters were about two years old my husband, who was convinced that I had intellectual abilities which should not go to waste, prodded me into finishing my degree. This was a fortunate decision because our plans for a large family were blocked by miscarriages and then by the growing disability of my husband, as a result of which it was necessary for me to teach full-time, with my twin daughters only five years old. It was at that point that the difficulties of combining professional and home duties became most critical. The patient love and concrete service which parenthood demands had always been difficult for me, but it became positively irksome and seemingly trivial when compared to the glories of helping students to find Christ and the intellectual stimulation of the academic atmosphere, much more suited to my natural gifts than home-life. Although I loved my husband and children deeply, I began to find the routines of domestic life more and more annoying so that I finally was forced to confront the fact that my center of gravity had shifted gradually from that of wife and mother to that of professional teacher.

It was not until the successful birth of our third child that my life began to assume greater harmony. The delight I experienced in my son, heightened by the new experience for me of breast feeding, led to a renewed appreciation of the deep meaning of the family. At the same time I discovered that my son was happier in some ways than my daughters had been at his age, because of the fact that he spent lots of time with his father, with his sisters, and with playmates at the house of his sitter. I also learned first hand that well-run nursery schools do much more to help in the discipline and development of the child than is afforded by many mothers, especially those, like me, who have no special abilities in the area of the early education of young children.

Now, four years later, my husband is coming out of his chronic illness, and we are expecting a fourth child. Although my duties as teacher have expanded in the meantime to include heading an academic department and I have also become a writer and speaker, I think that I am happier now in my various roles than ever before and that we, as a family, have achieved a much better harmony in our many commitments of love.

The Christian Image of the Person. Many arguments about feminism turn around two fundamental images of the person. Some thinkers view growth in personhood in terms of self-fulfillment. It is my contention that Christian thought presupposes an alternative image of the person in which each individual is essentially joined to others, such that it is precisely by concern for the happiness of others that the person becomes his or her true self as envisaged by God.

It is a fundamental part of Revelation that femininity and masculinity are God-given aspects of personhood, and that the goal of existence is the surrender of talents to Christ so that they can be used for building the kingdom of love “on earth as it is in heaven,” not for the individual’s own self-satisfaction.

One need only look at the topic of abortion to realize how significant a difference it makes whether a thinker holds to an image of growth in terms of self-fulfillment or to one of happiness through self-giving in community according to one’s God-given nature. One whose image of the person appears primarily in terms of autonomy will readily think of the unwanted fetus as a parasite in the body of the mother. One who conceives of the person as intrinsically related to others will see motherhood as the unfolding of the meaning of femininity. In terms of personal decision the woman who says “I have a problem pregnancy” views herself as central and the baby as a mere object; whereas the woman who speaks of “the baby created by God entrusted to me and dwelling invisibly in my womb – miracle of miracles!” obviously thinks of her selfhood as fulfilled through relationship.

For the Christian, all the steps along the road – from falling in love to the vows of matrimony in Christ, from sexual intercourse to parenthood and the feeding and education of children – all take place within the community of love formed in God in His Mystical Body.

Accordingly, a fundamental principle of Christian feminism must be the primacy of intimate I-Thou relationships. In marriage this vocation is lived out in terms of the joys and sufferings of being a

wife and mother. Normally this would involve having many children. I do not believe it is Christian to work out a quota beforehand in terms of placing another value higher than a child, except in unusual cases. For the celibate, femininity is experienced in the unique intimacy of spousal love with Christ and in the tender caring love for others seen as children of God. For the single woman, the feminine vocation is lived as the free response in love to Christ and to those He sends to be recipients of the special gifts the Holy Spirit will bestow on her in her varying commitments.

The principle that woman is made for intimate I-Thou love has as a corollary that the demands of a career should not conflict with the development of the woman as a loving person. Difficulties may develop in fulfilling this goal for two basic reasons: 1) because an individual woman may find the demands of her work less taxing and more pleasurable in certain ways than relationships within the family, leading to neglect of those she is most called to care for, even to divorce in the worst cases; and, 2) because present-day society does not make sufficient provision for the family life of the working mother, in the form of daycare centers at the job, pregnancy leave, interesting part-time work, and so on. Christians, in general, are especially sensitive to the first difficulty, whereas most feminists rightly fight for overcoming the problems which arise in the second category. I believe that the Christian feminist should try to help women deal with both problems.

Response to the Holy Spirit. A fundamental principle of Christian feminism, as I see it, is that God wills that every individual serve the kingdom of heaven with every talent that He has given him. A yearning to explore an aspect of one's personality previously undeveloped may well be an impulse from the Holy Spirit pushing a woman to overcome the barrier of false modesty or fear of failure so that God can employ the spiritual, intellectual, artistic, emotional, or organizational gifts He has given her in terms of serving the needs of the people around her. Especially in the case of women without children, or those whose children are in school, it appears that much time is wasted in activities neither satisfying to the woman nor helpful to society because of a false image of the perfect Christian woman as ever-present in the home. To fill in the time, many a woman will devote herself compulsively to housekeeping beyond the real needs of her family. Others expend themselves tirelessly in volunteer work they are pressured into by various organizations rather than trying to find essential Christian work whether paid or unpaid which will utilize their special abilities.

Some mothers who try to explore aspects of their personalities not brought out in the home situation will feel guilty about any joy they experience in such pursuits. Unconsciously they may feel that only what is directly related to the family is God-willed. A woman may wonder if she has a right to take up painting, for example, unless she can derive income from it for the family. Unconsciously she may be responding more to worldly economic values in this respect than to Christian values. She may fail to see that God is glorified more by artistic beauty than by a new washing machine she could buy if she worked part-time at the super-market to increase the family income. Perhaps it is part of the plan of the Holy Spirit in leading the mother to explore a hidden yearning to paint, that her husband and children would come to love beauty and glorify God because of their appreciation of the mother's new-found talent.

Even when a woman's work is desired by the family for financial reasons and represents in itself a clearly good use of talents, such as in the vocation of nurse, the woman may measure her worth only in terms of her family vocation and view her work on the job as only a necessary evil or as unmeritorious because she enjoys it. Sometimes this feeling is fostered by the attitude of the husband who fears any change in previous arrangements. "Will our home become like a motel if my wife works?" is a very understandable query. A family having difficulty adjusting to new areas of work for the mother may express its anxiety by insisting on perfect performance by the woman of all her domestic duties. Perhaps in such cases the Holy Spirit is gently prodding the husband and children to a more dedicated sharing of chores as they notice how fatigued the mother is at the end of a week's work.

Of course still deeper problems arise if a husband's entire sense of security is based on viewing his wife as inferior or if he is pathologically jealous. The loving wife must try to help her husband to arrive at a position of greater trust. Sometimes she might have to alter her plans but sometimes he is being called to grow by accepting her vocation. Rather than describing further all the problems a working

woman may have with her own image of her vocation and in dealing with family reactions, let us present a picture of an ideal situation of harmonious commitment to family and work.

Imagine a woman who took a degree in elementary school teaching but never taught because of marriage and child-raising. From age 20 to 35 she gave herself lovingly and unstintingly to the needs of her husband and children. Now the last little one is in the first grade. In prayerful reflection and in discussion with the family, she arrives at the conclusion that her special talents should be put at the service of the local Catholic school as a teacher. The same love previously centered around the family is now spread to other children, as she brings motherly affection and Christian zeal to bear in the education of a new generation of Christians.

She comes home each day tired but happy, sometimes irritable with her own children but probably no more so than other parents. Her husband and children are proud of her. They participate in her accomplishments, and although they may miss certain services such as chauffeuring, home-baked cookies, and the like, they gain on the other hand in intellectual stimulation and an image of their mother as showing the way to vital service commitment in the community. They may also very often benefit from the fact that she will not experience the need to cling to them possessively, as do so many mothers with nothing to do all day who live through their older children.

“Love and do what you will!” This famous phrase of St. Augustine, so often misquoted to justify situation ethics, seems to me truly applicable to the many commitments of the Christian woman. The two principles given above of the primacy of the intimate love of the family as willed by God, together with the duty to develop one’s own talents at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, do not dispense each woman from the necessity of probing God’s will to discover what is the most loving way for her to be a woman in terms of the special needs of her own personality, the family, and of the society around her.

One woman may love God, her husband and family by staying at home, giving her spare time to contemplative prayer, using her intellectual gifts as psychologist to her own family and to friends and neighbors, applying creativity to home decoration, gourmet cooking and hospitality to the lonely and poor. Another woman may be called upon by economic need to leave very small children in the care of responsible people. From nine to five she serves others in her work with joy and peace and Christian love, and then she returns tired but eager to be with her husband and children (perhaps without a husband if she is widowed or separated).

Some mothers may have a special vocation in some field which requires several years regretted postponement of conception, or a sharing of work and child-raising with the husband. Some mothers have even been called by God, as was St. Elizabeth Seton, to live as religious while some of her children were cared for elsewhere. In all of this, again, the most important factor is love – love of children, love of husband, and genuine love of Christ.

Some Theological Reflections

by FR. OWEN BENNETT, O.F.M., CONV.

The opening chapters of *Genesis* make it quite clear that human nature is not complete without woman. There is, of course, an obvious biological sense in which this is true. The lesson of *Genesis* goes beyond this. Man is master of all the animals and of the birds of the air; but they are not his equals. Yet man needs a suitable partner, in whom he will recognize himself, and come to know himself in the free response of his equal.

The Lord God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him." So the Lord God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air . . . but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man. (*Genesis 2:18-20*)

And the account goes on to describe how the Lord God cast the man into a deep sleep, and then took the woman from his side, and also how the man recognized the woman as his equal: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken" (*Gen. 2:23*). And finally the account tells us that the man welcomed the woman as his companion and spouse – a model for Everyman: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" (*Gen. 2:24*).

Thus, according to Genesis, man comes to know himself – to attain peace and completion – through the companion the Lord God gives him, the companion who is his equal. And although the woman becomes the occasion of his fall from grace, mankind itself is continued through her fruitfulness. Woman is the occasion of man's sin which leads to death, but woman is also Eve, 'the living one,' the mother of all the living (*Gen. 3:20*). Sin upsets the relationship of equality between man and woman:

To the woman he [God] said:
I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing;
in pain shall you bring forth children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
and he shall be your master. (*Gen. 3:16*)

But the equality is not utterly destroyed, nor even permanently, as a consequence of sin. Indeed, the woman is made subject to her husband and brings forth her children in pain, but woman is also given hope: there is an enmity placed between her and the Spirit of Evil. For God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel" (*Gen. 3:15*).

For the rest, the Old Testament shows us woman as occupying a subordinate place in the public sector. She takes no official part in public worship. Yet the public absence of woman is not complete; God himself chooses some women to speak publicly in his name. Miriam, the sister of Aaron, was a prophetess, who spoke publicly in praise of God after the deliverance of the people from Pharaoh's army (*Exodus 15:20*). And in the book of Judges we read of Deborah, the prophetess, who used to sit under a palm tree while the Israelites came to her for judgment and she transmitted the commands of the Lord (*Judges 4:5-6*). And Judith, the chaste and courageous widow, is the deliverer of her people.

It is in the private sector, however, that woman is held in high honor, contrary to the usual view of woman in the ancient oriental world. She is the equal of her husband in the education of her children, a matter on which the Old Testament has much to say, emphasizing the God-given authority of father and mother in the education of their sons and daughters. The Old Testament praises of woman are expressive of a deeper personal regard and love for woman as companion and helpmate than is to be found elsewhere in the ancient world. These praises more than outweigh the criticisms of feminine wiles and weakness.

But the true praise of woman is fully set forth only in the new dispensation. Only in the revelation of the mystery of Christ does the exalted role of woman in God's eternal design appear. In this revelation the New Testament completes and fulfills the Old Testament picture of woman, showing the glorious beauty and queenliness of the Woman of Genesis and the Bride of the Canticle. It does this, fundamentally, in depicting the character and the actions of Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Incarnate Word. As Eve had been the wayward occasion of man's fall, so Mary is the faithful and generous human instrument whose response is made for the whole human race in opening the way for the new Adam's triumph. As Eve was mother of all the living in the flesh, so Mary by her response to God becomes mother of all the living in the Spirit.

Mary is redeemed in a uniquely special way. She comes, a newly created Paradise, from the hands of God, full of the fragrance of heaven, through the anticipated merits of her Son. In Mary, woman is the

dearest companion of the God-Man. No part of his redemptive work is without her. She accepts him, bears him, offers him, educates him, lets him go from her and remains herself hidden, until the day she stands beneath the Cross and hears from his own lips the proclamation of her universal motherhood. In Mary, woman is the center of faith and prayer for the infant Church awaiting the strength of the Spirit at Pentecost. In her Assumption Mary wins that victory over death which is the joy of the whole Church, for all of her children see in the triumph of their mother a foretaste and a foretelling of their own. In all of Mary's special prerogatives the Church sees her own blessings and graces in their most perfect realization, and rejoices the more deeply because every gift of God is pre-eminently glorious and beautiful in the humble Virgin Mother – God's masterpiece, and the Beloved of every creature. Every member of Christ goes to Mary with that instinct of faith which knows that God's supreme gift to her is a loving heart that reaches as far as the redeeming grace of her Son. "The whole fullness of the grace of Christ passes into Mary," wrote St. Jerome, "although differently." Where does the difference lie? How may it be expressed? Perhaps we can say that in Mary, the Woman of Scripture, the private sector which is woman's domain is extended to the whole of God's creation.

How does the new dispensation affect the role of women in general? The most concrete way is through the influence of Mary – through devotion to her, through prayer for her intercession, through reflection upon her role in the Christian mystery, and also through the efforts of many women, called by the Spirit, to imitate Mary in her life of virginal dedication to prayer and good works. It is with this virginal dedication in mind that the text of St. Paul is to be understood: "There does not exist among you . . . male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus" (*Galatians* 3:28). St. Paul was not making a statement here about the social and cultural status of woman, although the mystery of Christ will have its influence throughout all of human life. St. Paul is referring to the heavenly virginal life which is open to women as well as to men, in which the highest of religious vocations is open to all. The virginal dedication which Mary was moved by the Spirit to offer to God, and which she inquired about at the Annunciation, is now one to which all women may aspire if they feel the call from God.

This vocation does not remove the vocation of marriage, but it elevates all of human life, married or celibate, to a new awareness of the mystery of Christ. It reminds all that woman is given to man, in the deepest religious sense, so that all may grow in that unselfish love which is Christ's gift, in the Spirit, to the whole Church. The virginal life is an eschatological sign, a present and visible reminder that the true life is not that of this world which passes away, and that the true love of man and woman is attained only when it is lifted up into the self-sacrificing *agape* by which Christ took into himself his bride, the Church. The virginal life is a renunciation of a good for the sake of a higher good. As Jean Guitton pointed out, it does not imply a scorn of marriage, but a deeper reverence for the essence of marriage, a purified and glorified understanding of human love. The virginal life reminds the married couple that their love itself is a process of ineffable renunciation, for the virginal life takes its point of departure where married love should reach its culmination. Guitton wrote:

That which is normal love is realized little by little, which matures slowly, is achieved sorrowfully, this donation of the self spread over the years, is imposed upon conjugal love more by circumstances, by necessary metamorphoses than by the conscious will of man and wife; whereas virginity realizes all this in a kind of timeless moment repeated through time. . . . [Virginity is] given the whole love at a stroke while the other way of life parcels it out in successive installments.⁸

Thus in the Christian dispensation woman is raised again to equality with man "in Christ Jesus." But she is still to be silent in the church assemblies (*I Cor.* 14:34). She is not to teach publicly in Church (*I Timothy* 2:12). As in the Old Testament a woman is not forbidden to prophesy if she is moved by the Spirit (*I Cor.* 11:5). Veiled and silent in public worship, woman is encouraged to give witness at home. There is no question of woman receiving sacred orders. The whole patristic tradition is of one voice against the ordination of women to the priesthood.

It is clear that in the New Testament and in the Christian community woman's proper sphere is in the private sector. The sections in St. Paul's letters concerning the duties of women refer to the same kinds of domestic cares and good works as those mentioned in the Old Testament wisdom books. But there is an immense difference, now that the mystery of Christ has enlightened the world – now that the private sector has, in Mary, embraced the whole Church, and now that Mary, who exercises no hieratic authority in the Church, nevertheless “owns the Church” as the supremely loving and beloved mother, and as the all-perfect exemplar of mankind's response to God.

From New Testament times down to the present century, despite great changes in the material and cultural aspects of human life, it has been generally accepted that the role of woman is in the private sector. It is only in recent decades that this view has been widely questioned. On the other hand, Christ Our Lord allowed himself to be followed by holy women during his public ministry (*Luke 8:1ff*). After his resurrection he sent Mary Magdalene with a message to his disciples. In *The Acts of the Apostles* there are recorded several incidents in which women figure prominently. And surely the history of the Church provides many examples of women chosen by God to perform tasks of great importance: queens such as Helena, Matilda and Blanche; nuns like Gertrude, Mechtilde, Lutgarde and Margaret Mary; young girls called to tasks of a most unexpected kind such as Catherine of Siena and Joan of Arc; teachers of children, social apostles, missionaries of charity whose life-stories, which are the glory of the Church in the modern age, are replete with instances of originality and creativity.

Many serious thinkers thus look to a new age of the world in which woman will play a more influential role. However, this will not be through her seeking to imitate the masculine role, but through her spiritualizing and humanizing influence, so necessary to balance masculine rationalism and restore unity in a world torn apart by man's ideological excesses. Once again, Guitton said it well:

Our abstract and violent culture, oscillating ceaselessly between the most subtle speculation and the most cruel of conflicts (when it does not combine them), is confronted with this dilemma: either to destroy itself or to return to its sources. This return to simplicity, to nature, to humanity, to being, to a truth commensurate with the heart, to the union of the mystical, the reasonable and the practicable, will undoubtedly come to pass under the pressure of diverse influences: and among them that of woman might well be preponderant.⁹

Guitton is echoing here the thought of such figures as Rilke, Gertrude von Le Fort, Bergson, Berdiaeff, and Charles Morgan.

This return to the heart of humanity, modeled on the role of Mary, is not a reaction or a retrogression, but a going forward to a new level of human achievement, to a new and richer embodiment in society of the truth of the Gospel. The time is coming when the private sphere must indeed go out to embrace the whole world, when the oblation character of truly virginal love must so fill the natural family institution that it will throw itself open to the wider community with a love more amply conceived. Indeed, the fruitful virginity of Mary, by which God has given to mankind the rewards of eternal salvation, is not truly understood until it is recognized as calling all family love into integration with the community of mankind, an integration that will begin with a family consciousness actively manifesting itself in the parish, the neighborhood, the town and the countryside. Precisely here is the pastoral demand of our own day and of the time that lies ahead. Here is the special place where the work of the woman is needed, the domain in which she must be the constant teacher, healer, unifier and inspiration. It is the private sector opened up to fill the whole world – the labor of putting the energy immanent in love to the service of the human community.

SYMPOSIUM NOTES:

¹E. Maccoby and C. Tacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences*. Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1974.

²For these findings see C. Noble, *Learning, Psychomotor* in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1974; J. Sherman, *On the Psychology of Women: A Survey of Empirical Studies*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1971; T. Alexander, *There are Sex Differences in the Mind, Too* in *Annual Editions: Readings in Psychology 75/76*. Guilford: Dushkin Pub. Co., 1975; and Maccoby and Jacklin.

³For these findings, see Maccoby and Jacklin; Serman; and W. Mischel, *Introduction to Personality*. (2nd ed.) N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

⁴Sherman (see n. 1).

⁵For the evidence relating to this section, see J. Coleman, *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*. (4th ed.) Glenview: Scott Foresman and Co., 1972.

⁶See J. Bardwick, *Psychology of Women*. N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1971; Maccoby and Jacklin; Mischel; and Sherman.

⁷Maccoby and Jacklin (see n. 1).

⁸Jean Guitton, *Human Love*, trans. from the French. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966, pp. 141-2.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 229.