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The Christian Concept of the Nature of Motherhood and its Implications in a Contemporary Context

Christine Lillian Fisk

A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy

School of Philosophy and Theology
The University of Notre Dame Australia

2018

Declaration of Authorship

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CHRISTINE LILLIAN FISK

Candidate's Name

Date: 07.2018

Abstract

The contemporary context presents countless ideologies and conflicting views about what femininity is and what it is not. In particular, the modern pursuit of equality and autonomy has resulted in the perception of motherhood as inconvenient in some quarters or, worse yet, inconsequential. This thesis considers the question as whether or not motherhood is separable from womanhood, and if there is indeed any inherent value to motherhood. The intent of this thesis was to go beyond the variety of views of what motherhood is to the two primary female figures in Scripture – Eve and Mary - to discern what they revealed about the nature of motherhood, and to then apply said conclusions into the contemporary context. In doing so, it will become evident that motherhood is indeed an essential part of who woman is. The living out of her vocation to motherhood in the various spheres of her life is thus the means by which woman discovers herself and reaches her potential as a human person. This study on the nature of motherhood contributes to the wider theological discussion of what womanhood is and how woman is called to practically live out her faith today.

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Introduction

Today the reality of motherhood is greeted with an immense array of conceptions and ideologies. Unsurprisingly, literature also reveals that the position and role of woman in family and in society are topics at the forefront of discussion today.¹ There is readily available a vast amount of theological research on the dignity of women and the great value of new life, as well as a common disregard for the two in the contemporary context. Yet, there is an apparent need for research on the Christian concept of motherhood itself and its relationship to femininity.

The Contemporary Context

There are many prolific factors operating on a variety of levels that have led to the existence of the range of the extant views and conceptions regarding motherhood. In the research undertaken for this thesis, the views most prominent today were based on interpretations of feminism, individualism, dualism, and consumerism. None of these ideologies can be said to be distinct from each other and all, to varying degrees, were revealed as having formative roles in what appears to be a growing division between the concepts of femininity and motherhood.

It is generally agreed that radical social changes have powerfully altered the self-understanding of women.² The majority of the world has or is experiencing the conclusion of the patriarchal order of society which upholds the male as the ideal and primary representation of the human being.³ Walter Kasper would even say that it is

¹ Walter Kasper, "The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology," in *The Church and Women. A Compendium*, (hereafter *The Church and Women*) ed. Helmut Moll, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 51; Karl Lehmann, "The Place of Women as a Problem in Theological Anthropology," in *The Church and Women*, ed. Helmut Moll, trans. Robert E. Wood (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 11; John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Apostolic Letter (hereafter *MD*), 1; John XXII, *Pacem in Terris*, Encyclical (hereafter *PT*), 41; Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, Encyclical (hereafter *HV*), 7. All magisterial documents in this thesis are sourced from <http://w2.vatican.va> (unless otherwise indicated).

² Jutta Burggraf, "The Mother of the Church and the Woman in the Church," in *The Church and Women*, ed. Helmut Moll, trans. by Maria Shrady (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 246-47; Lehmann, "The Place of Women as a Problem in Theological Anthropology," 11; *PT*, 41.

³ Jutta Burggraf, "Woman's Dignity and Function in Church and Society," in *The Church and Women*, ed. Helmut Moll, trans. Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 103; Kasper, "The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology," 52; Lehmann, "The Place of Women as a Problem in Theological Anthropology," 13.

perhaps the most significant cultural revolution of recent times,⁴ a revolution which, theologically speaking, aims to solve the inequality between man and woman that resulted from the Fall.⁵ This “revolution” of the sexes is primarily the result of women “becoming aware” of their full and equal dignity as human beings and their equal rights to involvement in public life.⁶ Nonetheless, a portion of feminist literature today no longer concerns itself with the legal and social equality of women but rather with the complete equalisation of the sexes⁷ or, in the extreme, the aggrandisement of women above men.⁸

Overall, honest attempts to come to a fuller appreciation and realisation of the true dignity of woman seem to have arrived at an outright denial of an objective type ‘woman’ and of traditional conceptions of femininity altogether.⁹ In some instances, the desire to be free from male domination has thus resulted in the fierce pursuit of self-determination and autonomy.¹⁰ The new ideal is a completely autonomous woman who achieves her identity in an “explosion of creative fantasy of a sex hitherto powerless.”¹¹ Nonetheless, regardless of external successes whether or not our society is indeed on its way to truly advocate the dignity of women remains questionable; for

⁴ Kasper, “The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology,” 52; John Miller, *Calling God “Father.” Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood & Culture* (New York: Paulist Press: 1999), 11, *PT*, 41.

⁵ Korinna Zamfir, “The Quest for the “Eternal Feminine”: An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman.” *Annali di Storia Dell’esegesi*, 24, no. 2 (2007): 520.

⁶ Kasper, “The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology,” 52; Miller, *Calling God “Father.” Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood & Culture*, 11; John XXII, *PT*, 41.

⁷ Burggraf, “The Mother of the Church and the Woman in the Church,” 338; Blanca Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image, in the Image of God He Created Them; Male and Female He Created Them”: Person, Nature, and Culture,” in *Woman and Man, the Humanum in its Entirety* (hereafter *Woman and Man*), ed. the Pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010) 63.

⁸ There are a vast number of feminist movements today, the differences between them sometimes substantial. It therefore must be noted that the above reference to feminism, and all following references are references to what Llovera calls “radical feminism,” or, “gender feminism.” Gender feminism is widely present today and, whilst originally aimed at the equality of the sexes, now seeks to oppose the concept that humanity can be divided into two sexes. Anatomical differences can thus not be said to correspond to nature but can be said to be something conventional and imposed upon an individual by societal norms. Being “male” and being “female” are thus non-specific concepts left to the individual to both appropriate and define. It is for this reason, and because of its influence on contemporary attitudes towards motherhood, that gender feminism is what is referred to when speaking of “feminism” in the context of this review. Cardinal Antonio Canizares Llovera, “Reflection on the Subject of Women Twenty Years after the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*: Evaluation and Prospects,” in *Woman and Man*, ed. by the Pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 23-29. See also, Marguerite A. Peteers, “Gender: An Anthropological Deconstruction and a Challenge for Faith” in *Woman and Man*, ed. the Pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 289).

⁹ Barbara Albrecht, “Is There an Objective Type ‘Woman’?” in *The Church and Women*, ed. Helmut Moll, trans. Maria Shady (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 35-36; Peteers, “Gender: An Anthropological Deconstruction and a Challenge for Faith,” 289.

¹¹ Albrecht, “Is There an Objective Type ‘Woman’?” 37.

today the Christian priority of sexuality, motherhood, marriage, and family is rejected in pursuit of the androgynous human.¹²

It is understandable that women are initially identified as women by differences owing to the reproductive function.¹³ Naturally, then, in the desire for women to free themselves from past constraints of devaluation and domination (specifically in relation to domestic roles as wife and mother), there has been a move to separate themselves from the compulsion of their biological nature to reproduce. It is part of gender feminism's "secret dogmas" that anything innate or pre-assigned, and not determined by the individual, is a hindrance to self-fulfilment and must, therefore, be rejected.¹⁴ Society today also distorts the true meaning of sexuality through separating it from its essential reference to the human person.¹⁵ Some hence argue that a woman can liberate herself from anything that may hinder her development, able to fully realise her "potential" through an act of will.¹⁶ From these basic postulates of dualism and individualism follow significant new conceptions of sexual morality, the number of children one has, divorce, and abortion. But, even more concerning, is the consequential development of a deep confusion over feminine identity and the value of motherhood.¹⁷

With an emphasis on individualism as betterment, the vocation to be a mother has been greatly disparaged in the last two centuries, viewed often as demeaning to women.¹⁸ What is considered most valued and most important has shifted from the fostering of life to the conspicuous achievements of society. To those factors which favour woman's breaking out of her role belongs her increasing participation in professional life, which makes her economically independent of men, and enables her to discard

¹² Paola Bignardi, "Women's Responsibility and Participation in Building up the Church and Society," in *Woman and Man* ed. the Pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 138; Burggraf, "Woman's Dignity and Function in Church and Society," 103; Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Apostolic Exhortation (hereafter *FC*), 24.

¹³ Lehmann, "The Place of Women as a Problem in Theological Anthropology," 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid* 39.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 32; Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 57-60.

¹⁶ Burggraf, "The Mother of the Church and the Woman in the Church," 244.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ It is primarily militant feminists who have both implicitly and explicitly disparaged the concept of motherhood through their belief systems about who woman should be and what holds her back from being this. Such concepts have trickled into modern thinking. Kasper, "The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology," 60-61; Joyce Little, *The Church and the Culture War. Secular Anarchy or Sacred Order* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 141.

the role of a “domestic in the family.”¹⁹ Overall, literature hence reveals that extreme forms of gender feminism have done harm to the fundamental relationship between mother and child by its insistence that motherhood is inimical to woman’s independence and self-fulfilment.²⁰ However, if Christian theology determines that motherhood is indeed an intrinsic aspect of femininity, then the emancipation from motherhood is essentially an emancipation from being a woman.²¹

Hand in hand with individualism, consumerism has also had a role in harming the relationship between femininity and motherhood.²² Both men and women can come to view the blessing of having a child more as an impediment to their accumulation of wealth. The consumer mentality, combined with an apprehension and despair about the future, rob married couples of the generosity and strength needed for bringing new life into the world.²³ Thus, the conception of a child is frequently understood, not as a blessing, but as a ‘danger’ from which to protect oneself.²⁴

There are also many who, for varied reasons, are physically unable to “increase and multiply.” Infertility is a problem affecting a considerable proportion of people worldwide.²⁵ Furthermore, through the increasing secular emphasis on freedom and success as self-actualisation, barrenness has also become the wilful choice of a number of women. In striving to break free from the unjust chains of objectification and domination, society has come to objectify the great blessing of new life.²⁶ To an extent, children have become somewhat of a commodity, an object every woman has the right to acquire when and as she wishes. A woman has a real and well-founded right to continue her professional work, to safeguard her reputation, to maintain a certain standard of life.²⁷ Nevertheless, it is a fact that this claim to exercise real rights is often demanded to the detriment of the concept and actualisation of motherhood.²⁸

¹⁹ Albrecht, “Is There an Objective Type ‘Woman’?” 37; Little, *The Church and the Culture War. Secular Anarchy or Sacred Order*, 141.

²⁰ Ibid, 157; Miller, *Calling God “Father.” Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood & Culture*, 11, 15.

²¹ Kasper, “The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology,” 60-61.

²² Burggraf, “The Mother of the Church and the Woman in the Church,” 237; John Paul II, *FC*, 30.

²³ Ibid, 6.

²⁴ Ibid, 16, 30; Albrecht, “Is There an Objective Type ‘Woman’?” 40; *FC*, 32.

²⁵ Agneta Sutton, *Infertility and Assisted Conception. What You Should Know. Answers to questions about Medical Techniques of Assisted Conception*, (Melksham, Wiltshire: Redwood Press Ltd, 1993), 41.

²⁶ *FC*, 24-30 (see especially 24).

²⁷ *PT*, 11; Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, 62.

²⁸ Ibid, 57-62.

A Study on the Christian Concept of Motherhood

Various literature on motherhood and/or femininity refer to the current challenges facing the modern woman. Of these struggles, the concept of motherhood is a predominant theme and one shrouded by uncertainty and ambiguity.²⁹ There is, thus, a need to develop the theology of motherhood and its relationship to femininity.

With such a variety of conceptions, it is essential that a presentation of the truth be made.³⁰ The dignity of woman has, in recent years, become a topic increasingly looked at and addressed by the Church, not as a new teaching, but in her efforts to assert and deepen what is already believed. This is, in large part, her response to the rising popularity of voices speaking out against what the Church upholds about women and the voices testifying that the Church belittles women (to one degree or another).³¹ The Church thus desires strongly to prevent the emancipation of woman from becoming her emancipation from being a woman and protect the great sacredness of life.³²

As such, the Church calls for further study into all matters concerning the meaning and dignity of being a woman, that she may greater understand women's dignity and vocation and thus be able to speak out proactively to the world today.³³ Therefore, not only will an analysis of the Christian concept of motherhood be a relevant area of study, the Church indeed urges and calls for it.

Perhaps one of the most significant and influential works the Church has produced on the dignity of woman, especially in the last few centuries, is Saint John Paul II's *Mulieris Dignitatem (MD)*. Issued over twenty years ago, this Apostolic Letter is still utilised as a primary reference for Church teaching on the dignity of woman. *MD* uses Scripture as its primary source, turning to the creation of humanity, the accounts of

²⁹ Likewise, there is also a growing dialogue concerning masculinity and fatherhood. The next chapter of this thesis will reveal masculinity and femininity as the two distinct but essential elements that comprise humanity. Their interconnectedness entails that one cannot fully be understood without some understanding of the other. As such, masculinity and fatherhood will be referenced in this thesis. However, it would go beyond the scope of this thesis to offer any discussion on the particulars of masculinity and fatherhood.

³⁰ Rm 10:14-17.

³¹ *FC*, 32.

³² Kasper, "The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology," 53.

³³ *MD*, 1.

women in Scripture, and the treatment of women by Christ and Saint Paul as the source and foundation of its teaching.

This thesis will hence use *MD* as the foundation for its discussion on the Christian concept of motherhood. The Scripture *MD* cites and the commentary it offers will provide the direction and flow of this thesis. More particularly, in the effort to disclose the Christian concept of motherhood, the study of Eve and Mary as the two prime female figures in Scripture through the lenses of *MD* will prove a fitting and insightful means of coming to a better knowledge of the Christian concept of motherhood. *MD* likewise turns to Eve and Mary when discussing womanhood and this approach seems most fitting. As Deborah Sawyer writes:

Despite the myriad theories of secularization that characterized the study of religion in the twentieth century, and despite recent attempts to modify them in the light of contemporary fashions in new or re-discovered spiritualities, the unique influence of Christianity's traditional archetypes, Eve and Mary, remains. As archetypes of the feminine, expressing divine and human possibilities... The theology and popular religion associated with them, has affected the lives of men and woman down the centuries, presenting humanity with goals of perfection and depths of imperfection, influencing the very notions of self and desire.³⁴

In addition to *MD*, this thesis will also take into consideration the works of Saint Edith Stein on femininity. Writing and speaking as both an educator and a philosopher in the 1920's and 30's, Saint Edith Stein was a pioneer of studies on the Christian concept of femininity. Saint Edith Stein, herself, is an example of woman living out her feminine vocation in the professional world, being a philosopher who desired to obtain a professorship, something that was impossible for women in the 1920's.³⁵ Hence, when reflecting on the nature of woman's vocation and contribution to society, she wrote as a woman with professional ambitions, ambitions rooted in her desire to live in accord with her God-given potential.³⁶ Her life and achievements are a testament to the feminine genius that Saint John Paul II speaks of in his *Letter to Women (LW)*.³⁷

That which Saint John Paul II touches on in *MD*, Saint Edith Stein discusses at greater length in her essays on women. Like *MD*, her work also looks first and foremost at the

³⁴ Deborah Sawyer, "Hidden Subjects: Rereading Eve and Mary," *Theology & Sexuality*, 14, no. 3 (2008): 305.

³⁵ Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 20-25.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 77.

³⁷ *LW*, see especially 9.

anthropological truths revealed in Scripture. In particular, it will be of interest and benefit for this thesis to look into Saint Edith Stein's work on the nature of woman before the Fall, and how the Fall affected woman's natural dispositions.³⁸ Doing so will help develop both an understanding of motherhood as it was intended, as well as an understanding of why society is confronted with the array of issues and misconceptions regarding motherhood today. Furthermore, looking at Saint Edith Stein's works will also lend to helping understand why and how Christ, through His words and actions, appealed to and affirmed the nature of woman as intended in the beginning.

Saint Edith Stein's works, particularly "Woman" in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, Vol. 2, will also prove invaluable in translating the Christian concept of motherhood into the contemporary context. She takes into consideration the reality of the working woman, asking questions still relevant today, such as: "Does involvement in the professional life violate the order of nature and grace?"³⁹ More crucially, she asks the underlying question of whether or not woman's purpose to reflect the Divine is something that can only be realised in marriage and motherhood, or if it can indeed be realised in other ways as well.⁴⁰ In other words, did God design woman so that her being a physical mother is crucial to the fulfilment of her nature?

Looking at St. John Paul II's *MD* and Saint Edith Stein's essays on femininity, will prove advantageous due to their insights into the Christian concept of femininity and motherhood in, what was for them, a contemporary context. Furthermore, their insights are coming from both masculine and feminine, theological and philosophical perspectives. As such, looking at them together, as distinct yet complementary works, will result in a more holistic thesis. This thesis will, therefore, utilise these two thinkers in order to approach and analyse the Christian concept of motherhood and its implications for women today.

As asserted earlier, the topics of feminism and gender are issues under discussion today and both influence contemporary conceptions of motherhood. Thus, addressing

³⁸ Edith Stein, "Woman" in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, Vol. 2, eds. Dr. L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, OCD, trans. by Freda Mary Oben (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1987), 75-80.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 79.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 187.

the Christian concept of motherhood, when seeking to translate the conclusions reached from Scripture into the modern context, this thesis will need to touch on these issues. Nonetheless, the entire spectrum of feminism and its philosophies cannot be dealt with within this thesis. Some aspects of secular feminism and its implications will be addressed within this thesis. However, this thesis endeavours to particularly look at the Christian concept of motherhood. As such, the work of Tina Beattie will be utilised to ensure a representation of a modern “Catholic feminist” perspective on the question at hand.

Explaining her position and motivation in the introductory chapter of *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, she writes:

I situate myself as a member of the believing community of the Roman Catholic Church, and from that saturation with all its inherent partialities and idiosyncrasies, I ask what it means to be a woman whose identity is mediated through the symbolic narratives of the Catholic faith with their androcentric and patriarchal assumptions.⁴¹ ...My intention is to liberate the theological language of maternal femininity from the colonizing discourses of masculinity, by mimetically assuming the position of the theoretical Catholic woman as well as being a Catholic woman theorist.⁴²

Tina Beattie is adamant that the Church is aggrieved due its theological constructs of men and women being patriarchal in source and nature.⁴³ She also upholds that Saint John Paul II’s papacy intentionally resisted “innovative theologies,” such as feminism, that developed after the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁴ Thus it will be interesting to look-at her contrasting ideologies concerning woman in reference to both Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein.

- Tina Beattie’s work *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate* will be used as the primary reference point for Tina Beattie’s position. *God’s Mother Eve’s Advocate* is a Scriptural and contextual work that focuses primarily on Eve and Mary and the way conceptions of these two figures has shaped and still shapes perceptions of femininity

⁴¹ Tina Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate* (London: Continuum, 2002), 2.

⁴² Ibid, 4.

⁴³ Ibid, 6. Indeed, - Tina Beattie’s theology of Eve and Mary in *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate* is underpinned with her sense of injustice at the exclusion of woman from the priesthood and thus one finds this sense - “injustice” underlying many of her conclusions. This is also the case in some of her other works. For example: Beattie, “The Quest for the ‘Eternal Feminine’:” An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman,” 521.

⁴⁴ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 1.

today. This work will hence prove to be an interesting addition to the insights of Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein on femininity.

The Question at Hand

This thesis proposes to answer the question concerning the relationship between femininity and motherhood by returning to Scripture. It will do so through the lenses of *MD*, with reference to Saint Edith Stein's essays on femininity, and making mention of the views of Tina Beattie. These writers will be utilised for the specific focus of their work on femininity, as well as their use of Scripture as a primary source from which they derive their conclusions on femininity and all that it entails.

This thesis will turn to Sacred Scripture as the primary Revelation of the nature of the human person, offering a thematic survey of the Christian concept of motherhood as revealed in Scripture. Due to the immensity of Scripture and the limited length of this thesis, particular passages to study will be selected from the passages referred to in this thesis' foundational text - *MD*. As such, attention will primarily be placed on the creation accounts of Genesis and on the passages of the New Testament concerning Mary's *fiat* to the Incarnation and her role in Christ's life. To different measures, these passages are also the ones employed by Saint Edith Stein in "Woman," the second volume in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*. Therefore, it is these passages that will be the focus of this thesis.

Particular focus will be placed on 'the beginning,' looking at the person of Eve, both pre- and postlapsarian. Conclusions drawn from this overview will then be viewed in light of the New Testament. This will involve looking at Mary's fruitfulness and motherhood and comparing and contrasting the New Eve with the First Eve. Such a survey will be undertaken in a format that mirrors the basic outline and content of *MD* whilst being accompanied throughout by the works and commentaries of *MD* and Saint Edith Stein's essays on femininity in "Woman" in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, Vol. 2.

Finally, applications of the conclusions reached from this look at Eve and Mary will then be made to the contemporary context. The concepts of physical and spiritual motherhood will be touched upon, as well as a look at how motherhood and the

professional sphere do or do not relate with each other. Although barrenness is not addressed in *MD*, it is a prominent issue faced by countless women today and due to its being directly related to motherhood, this proposed study on motherhood would be lacking without some attention to the subject. Therefore, after looking at what the aforementioned Scripture passages and *MD* teach on motherhood and fertility, conclusions will be drawn as to what this then says about barrenness. This glance at barrenness will be essential in the effort to translate the defined Christian concept of motherhood into a contemporary context.

It is hoped that this study on the Christian concept of motherhood as revealed by the Scriptural figures of Eve and Mary will provide an answer to what motherhood is and what its relationship to femininity is. In doing so, relevant insights into and applications for the fields of biblical study, moral theology, bioethics, and pastoral care, will be gained.

1. “In the beginning”

1.1. Introduction

After both a historical and a theological contextual overview of the topic at hand, *MD* begins its reflections on woman by returning to the beginning as revealed in Genesis.¹ Saint John Paul II titles this inaugural chapter, which will essentially lay the foundations for his making apparent the dignity and vocation of woman: “The Image and Likeness of God.” Such a primary focus is placed on the Genesis creation accounts as, in the words of Saint John Paul II: “we can say that the biblical account puts forth the truth about the personal character of the human being.”² In the efforts to discern the truth of who woman is Saint John Paul II thus deems it pertinent to first return to these biblical accounts. The first chapter of this thesis on Christian concept motherhood, will thus likewise begin by turning to the beginning.

Offering a paraphrased catechetical presentation of the creation of the human person is not the intention of this chapter. Most of what follows is essentially the primary truths of the Catholic understanding of the human person. Nonetheless, it is important to pay heed to such affirmations and to the creation narratives in order to grasp some sense of the Christian concept of the human person. It is only in doing so that this thesis will be able to look more specifically at the concept of woman, and hence of motherhood.

In turning to the Book of Genesis, one can see that the beginning of the created world is revealed in two separate accounts.³ Saint John Paul II affirms that by reflecting on both accounts, one in light of the other, one is able to comprehend more truly what exactly it is that constitutes the personal character of the human person and what is meant by their being created in the *imago Dei*.⁴ Both the first account of Genesis 1:26-27, and the second of Genesis 2:18-25 contain essential anthropological truths, present

¹ This thesis acknowledges that, underpinning the theology of *MD*, is Saint John Paul’s II extensive work on the theology of the body. As such, the primary collated forms of Saint John Paul II’s homilies on the theology of the body - *Man and Woman He Created Them*, and *The Redemption of the Body and Sacramentality of Marriage (Theology of the Body) – From Weekly Audiences of His Holiness – September 5, 1979-Novemeber 28, 1984* (hereafter RBSM) - will be referenced in this section insofar as they further support the reflections of *MD* being used here.

² *MD*, 6.

³ Note here that there are other brief biblical accounts of creation throughout Scripture, but here, and throughout this chapter, reference is made only to the two primary creation accounts - those found in the initial chapters of Genesis.

⁴ *MD*, 7.

in each, but to varying degrees of explicitness.⁵ Thus, the following section will look at both accounts jointly as an intentional couple, in order that a fuller understanding of who woman is, how she was created, and why she was created, might be reached.

In looking at both accounts, particular focus will be placed on the creation of humanity as “very good”, the creation of the human person in the *imago Dei*, and the creation of humanity as male and female. This chapter will then turn to Eve as the first woman, taking into consideration her creation, her role in and the effects of the Fall, and the significance of her title, “mother of all living.” In doing so, it is hoped that a twofold purpose will be accomplished: firstly, that necessary foundations will be laid for the development of discussions and conclusions in later chapters. From this foundation, it is hoped that the questions will begin to arise as to who woman is and what her capacity for motherhood entails.⁶

Secondarily, it is hoped that the discussions about the creation of humanity and the nature of woman in this chapter, will also invoke a sense of awe in the goodness of God and in His creation. Awe is the necessary basis for any discussion on the human person and perhaps, given historical treatments of women, an especially necessary basis for any discussion on the Christian concept of motherhood. Such awe should be discovered upon any look at the creation of humanity. Yet, as Thomas G. Weinandy notes, “The wonder and amazement that should accompany the astonishing biblical proclamation that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God is often absent today.”⁷ This absence of awe seems to be particularly evident in the modern views regarding woman’s vocation to motherhood. Thus, as this thesis aims to bring this topic of the Christian concept of woman and her vocation of motherhood into a contemporary context, it is hoped that a sense of fascination for who woman was created to be and for the *imago Dei* in her, will be stimulated.

So, in the opening words of *MD*’s third chapter on the creation of man: “Let us enter into the setting of the biblical ‘beginning.’ In it the revealed truth concerning man as

⁵ Note that all Scripture references in this thesis are taken from the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition.

⁶ These questions, for the most part, will hence be left hanging upon the close of this chapter (the answers to unfold in the chapters ahead). This chapter will achieve its end, nonetheless, through simply bringing these questions to light.

⁷ Thomas G. Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 6, no. 4 (2003): 15.

“the image and likeness” of God constitutes the immutable *basis of all Christian anthropology*.⁸

1.2. The Creation of Humanity

Throughout the two creation accounts of Genesis - Genesis 1:26-27 and 2:15-24 - one sees constant divine affirmations of the goodness of the human person. The affirmations that particularly stand out are: the divine act of creating humanity, the human person as the crowning of all creation, and the creation of humanity in the image and likeness of God. A brief look at the first two aspects of humanity’s creation will be undertaken. The majority of this section’s focus will be on the creation of humanity in the *imago Dei* and what this entails.⁹

Often humanity’s being created in God’s image and likeness overshadows the other aspects of its creation. All of the aspects of the creation of humanity are interrelated, for they are all regarding the same glorious event – God’s creation of humanity. One cannot thus separate or quantitatively compare humanity’s being created good to its being created in the *imago Dei*. Nonetheless, the reality is that these aspects are both mentioned individually within the creation accounts, so one must then endeavour to ask why. Rather than attempting to discern God’s intentions for wanting the accounts of Scripture to be written in this manner, it would seem more fruitful to simply take the creation accounts as they are, asking instead: what do the different affirmations of humanity’s goodness individually emphasise and reveal, that thus shed light on the others, and consequently enhance the whole?

1.2.1. In the Image of God He Created Him

And Behold it was Very Good

For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. How would anything have endured, if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have

⁸ *MD*, 6.

⁹ This is not, to imply that the creation of humanity as good is something to be overlooked or to be taken lightly, for, if God created all things about humanity good, this has significant implications on the nature of woman and the nature of her capacity to bring forth new life.

*been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.*¹⁰

The act of creating humanity is an affirmation of the dignity of the human person. God is good,¹¹ and that which finds its source in Him, is thus necessarily good.¹² Humanity, being created by God is hence necessarily good.¹³ In a conclusory manner of His creation of humanity, God also vocally affirms humanity's goodness.¹⁴ The human person is thus reckoned "very good."¹⁵ More particularly, the human person as male, and the human person as female are declared to be "very good."

This declaration of humanity's goodness almost seems unnecessary as logic has already led the reader to conclude that, as God is good and as creation flows forth from who God is, then creation is likewise necessarily good.¹⁶ Yet, as this verbal affirmation of humanity's goodness is found in Scripture, and, as this passage has God Himself voicing this acclaim, by no means can one pass over or belittle the significance of the Creator, pausing, beholding, and declaring humanity as "very good."¹⁷ However, as already stated, is not the rest of creation necessarily good by virtue of its having its source in God?¹⁸ Without searching too hard, it is evident that, even in the brevity of the two creation accounts, the essential goodness of the human person is emphasised exceptionally in comparison to every other element of creation.

Firstly, in both accounts, the goodness of the human person is affirmed through its being created last. Humanity is the pinnacle of all creation,¹⁹ the first among all created species.²⁰ The import of the human person is also revealed in the greater number of verses assigned to humanity's creation, over and above the number of verses attributed

¹⁰ Wis 11:24-26.

¹¹ Such is testified to by the great deeds of God revealed in Scripture. Scripture also explicitly states the goodness of God. For example, see: 2 Chr 5:13. Ezra 3:11; Ps 34:8; 106:1; 136:1; Heb 6:5; 1 Pet 2:3; etc.

¹² Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereafter CCC), 299.

¹³ Wis 11:24-26.

¹⁴ Gn 1:31.

¹⁵ "God creates an ordered and good world" (CCC 298).

¹⁶ Cf. Deut 32:4; Ps 104:31; 119:68; 1 Tim 4:4.

¹⁷ CCC 101-141. Cf. Rom 15:4 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21.

¹⁸ Gn 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

¹⁹ Graeme Auld, "Imago Dei in Genesis: Speaking in the Image of God," *The Expository Times* 116, no. 8 (May 2005): 261. See also, Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 81.

²⁰ Gn 1:26; 2:19. Cf. Gn 9:2-4; Js 3:7. See also, Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (hereafter *GS*), 12, and *MD*, 6.

to all other aspects of creation.²¹ Additionally, the superlative “very” distinguishes the goodness of the human person as somehow greater than the goodness of everything else. Nevertheless, the human person is not simply superior or set apart from the rest of creation because of these factors. Rather, the inclusion of these factors in the creation accounts reveal and point to the reality that humanity is somehow different from the rest of creation.²² This difference, as described by Saint John Paul II, is fundamentally that, “*Man - whether man or woman - is the only being among the creatures of the visible world that God the Creator ‘has willed for its own sake’; that creature is thus a person.*”²³

The importance of this difference, in regard to humanity and the rest of creation, is anticipated by the change of creational command. Prior to this point, the creation of everything has been initiated by the effectual divine statement: “Let there be...”/ “Let the...”²⁴ God creates simply by *fiat*. Now, as God moves to create humanity, He utters: “Let Us make.”²⁵ This change in command discloses that a different sort of creation is about to follow, something that is part of God’s creative exploits but yet somehow also distinct from it.²⁶ It also bespeaks the intentionality with which God is now about to make the human person. For the creation of humanity, there was consideration as well as collaboration: “Let Us make.”²⁷

These affirmations of humanity’s goodness impart the important truth that humanity is created exactly as God intended, an intentionality that is most clearly evident in the

²¹ Of course, one cannot place too much weight in how many verses are/are not assigned to something as verses and chapters in Scripture are divisions added later on in Tradition, in order to provide ease of writing, reading, and study. Nonetheless, one can see that in the Genesis 1 account, each aspect of creation generally has two to three verses assigned to it, whereas the creation of humanity has five. Then there is the second creation account, which seems to be written with the almost exclusive purpose of addressing in greater detail the particularities of the creation of humanity, such as, its purpose and its being created as male and female.

²² See, Auld, “Imago Dei in Genesis: Speaking in the Image of God,” 260. See also 260-262 for some of Auld’s examples of the characteristics humanity is revealed as sharing with God. See also *ibid*, 77, and Claudia Welz, “Imago Dei: References to the Invisible,” *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 65, no. 11 (2011): 77.

²³ *MD*, 7. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, Electronic Edition (The Catholic Primer, 2006), 9, 10.

²⁴ Gn 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24.

²⁵ Gn 1:26. For Claus Westermann, this is the fourth type of creation for the Hebrew people: Creation through utterance. For the significance and history of this type of creation, see Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 27-31.

²⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 135.

²⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Origin of Man,” in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera Supplementum*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972, 5-6, 8, as cited in, Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament I, Genesis 1-11* (hereafter *Ancient Christian Commentary*). Edited by Andrew Louth. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 25.

words, “Let Us make.”²⁸ In wisdom creation was made.²⁹ Nothing that was made came to be so by happenstance, nor with a lack of will or an absence of purpose, but “In wisdom You [God] made them all.”³⁰ God created all things good, all things for His glory,³¹ and, “The glory of God consists in the realisation of this manifestation and communication of His goodness, for which the world was created.”³² It then follows to ask, if creation came into being to show forth the glory of God, “to manifest His perfection,” in what ways does woman and her capacity to bear children do this?³³ Before exploring possible answers to this question, greater focus will be placed on the goodness of humanity and how humanity’s being made in the *imago Dei* is the greatest proof of humanity’s goodness. Looking at the nature of the *imago Dei* will also bear implications for later efforts to discover how the Christian concept of motherhood can be said to be part of woman’s unique manifestation of the *imago Dei*.

Let Us Make Man in Our Image

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*³⁴

The divine vocalisation of humanity’s goodness pales in comparison to the affirmation of its goodness through the gratuitous decision of God to make the human person in His own image and likeness.³⁵ Saint Gregory of Nyssa illustrates this truth clearly when he writes:

²⁸ This image is further illustrated and indeed vivified through the name “Adam.” In Hebrew, “adam” means “dirt/clay” (Auld, “Imago Dei in Genesis: Speaking in the Image of God,” 261). Thus, when one reads that God is creating humanity out of mud, they naturally tend to envision the image of God as sculptor, an image that bespeaks intimate and intentional moulding. Cf. Is 45:9, 11; 64:8; Rm 9:20-24.

²⁹ Prov 8:22-31.

³⁰ Ps 104:24; 145:9.

³¹ Rom 11:36. Cf. Job 33:4; Prov 16:4; Jn 1:1-3; Col 1:16; Heb 11:3. See also CCC 924.

³² CCC 294.

³³ Vatican I, *Dei Filius* 1: DS 3002; in *The Christian Faith*, ed. Jaques Dupuis (New York: Alba House, 2001), 173. Cf. Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 800, as cited in the CCC, 293.

³⁴ Gn 1:26-28.

³⁵ Gn 1:26-27. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 9, 10. For a broader overview of the variety of interpretations of what it means for humanity to be made in the image of God, see W. Sibley Towner, “Clones of God. Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation* 59, no. 4 (Oct 2005): 343. See also Claudia Welz for a study of the nature of images and their relation to the thing they are imaging, as well as for a select variety of different models of interpretation of what is meant by humanity being made in the image of God (Welz, “Imago Dei: References to the Invisible,” 75.) For an assessment of the theological implications of these terms by looking at their historicity,

God creates man for no other reason but that God is good; and being such, and having this as his reasons for entering upon the creation of our nature, he would not exhibit the power of his goodness in an imperfect form, giving our nature some of the things at his disposal and grudging it a share in another: but the perfect form of goodness is here to be seen by his both bringing man into being from nothing and supplying him with all good gifts. But since the list of individual good gifts is a long one, it is out of the question to apprehend it numerically. The language of Scripture therefore expresses it concisely by a comprehensive phrase, in saying that man was made “in the image of God,” for this is the same as to say that he made human nature participant in all good; for if the Deity is the fullness of good, and this is his image, the image finds its resemblance to the archetype in being filled with all good.³⁶

Thomas C. Oden holds that, of all the verses of the Old Testament, Genesis 1:26-27, are perhaps those most commented on by the Church Fathers.³⁷ This is not surprising in the least, for, as Saint John Paul II states both explicitly in *MD* and implicitly through his returning first and foremost to these verses of Genesis in his anthropological work, Genesis 1:26-27 is essentially the foundation of theological anthropology.³⁸ In these two verses of Genesis, the human person discovers the basic ontological truths of who they are - Who made them, why they were made, and how they were made - as well as the anthropological truths of their communal nature – what their relationship to their Creator is, what their relationship to the rest of creation is, and the interpersonal relationship of mutuality between male and female.³⁹ “The foundation of the whole human ‘ethos’ is deeply rooted in the image and likeness of God which the human being bears within himself from the beginning.”⁴⁰

Humanity is said to be created in God’s image and likeness, yet no image of God has prior been given.⁴¹ So, what about God is it that the human person embodies? It is apparent that Genesis 1:26 is not keen on explicit disclosure.⁴² It has been long held

see, Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human,” 16, and Towner, “Clones of God. Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” 341.

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man* 16.10, in *Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 34.

³⁷ Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 27. Such is also affirmed by David W. Cotter (David W. Cotter, O.S.B., *Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry. Genesis* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 21). Korinna Zamfir would extend this to include Genesis 2 through to 3, saying that these two chapters “have the most important effective history.” Korinna Zamfir, “The Quest for the ‘Eternal Feminine’: An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman,” 521.

³⁸ Welz, “Imago Dei: References to the Invisible,” 74.

³⁹ Towner, “Clones of God. Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” 354.

⁴⁰ *MD*, 7.

⁴¹ For a basic explanation of the transmission of the *imago Dei*, see, Towner, “Clones of God. Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” 351.

⁴² Welz, “Imago Dei: References to the Invisible,” 77.

that the image and likeness of God is evident in the human person's rational capacity and in his free will.⁴³ Tina Beattie adheres that this is so due to the influence of Origen's⁴⁴ doctrine of double creation on Greek and Byzantine Christian thought.⁴⁵ This theology upheld that the material world was a falling away from the pure spiritual unity of original creation. Humanity's being created in the image and likeness of God, consequently, refers solely to its immaterial qualities, with sexual difference only being a subsequent feature of creation. Since God is incorporeal and beyond sexual embodiment, the reference to "male" and "female" cannot refer to God but only to His creation.

In this homily on Genesis, Origen is intent that "it is our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible and immortal that is made 'according to the image of God'."⁴⁶ However, this intent does not seem to be a complete dismissal of the possibility of the *imago Dei* also being present in the physical.⁴⁷ Instead, it seems that he emphasises the *imago Dei* present in the spiritual more because he is writing with the understanding that, to uphold that the physical somehow contains the image of God is to heretically claim that God is somehow physical in nature.⁴⁸

This thought can be seen in some the significant early thinkers of the Church. After a rather amusing comparison of our bodily functions to those of animals and, metaphorically, to those of God, Saint Ambrose also concludes that,⁴⁹ "The flesh, therefore, cannot be made to the image of God. This is true, however, of our souls..."⁵⁰ And, similarly, Saint John of Damascus states,⁵¹ "That which is 'according to the image' is manifest in the intellect and free will."⁵²

⁴³ Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human," 21.

⁴⁴ Origen c.184/185-253/254.

⁴⁵ Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 50. Note here that this thesis does not move to prove or disprove this claim that it was indeed due to Origen's doctrine, instead, it is merely using it as a point of departure for discussion on what is meant by the Genesis revelation that humanity is made in the image and likeness of God.

⁴⁶ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 1.13, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 29.

⁴⁷ Although this could be the case.

⁴⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 1.13, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 29.

⁴⁹ Saint Ambrose, c. 339-397.

⁵⁰ Saint Ambrose, *Hexaemeron*, 6.8.44-45, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 29.

⁵¹ Among the themes of his works, Saint John of Damascus (c. 645 –750) placed particular emphasis on the notion of evil and the virtues and vices are of prominence. It is with such in mind that he writes on free will (B. Kotter, "John Damascene, St.," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 951-52).

⁵² Saint John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, 2.12, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 30.

That the *imago Dei* lies in the incorporeal aspect of the human person is still adhered to today. In *MD* Saint John Paul II states that:

What makes man like God is the fact that - unlike the whole world of other living creatures, including those endowed with senses (*animalia*) - man is also a rational being (*animal rationale*). Thanks to this property, man and woman are able to “dominate” the other creatures of the visible world (cf. *Gen* 1:28).⁵³ ...For every individual is made in the image of God, insofar as he or she is a rational and free creature capable of knowing God and loving him.⁵⁴

Emphasis has hence long been placed on the rationality and free will of the human person as the distinguishing feature by which one can say that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, when creating humanity, God did not say “Let us make Man’s will and intellect in Our image” but, “Let us make Man in Our image.” What this verse states, precisely through its lack of specificity, is that to be human is to bear the *imago Dei* and that the entirety of the human person bears this image and likeness. This understanding emphasises unity.⁵⁶ Stating such is not to suggest God has corporeal qualities.⁵⁷ Nor is it to object to centuries of theology upholding that the image of God in humanity is evident in their rationality. Rather, it is to raise the possibility that, as God made humanity in His image, the human person’s physical nature, in whatever capacity, might somehow also reflect God’s image and likeness.

This notion of the *imago Dei* being present in the corporeal is not entirely radical,⁵⁸ nor would it contradict the above assertion of Saint John Paul II in *MD*, nor would it move to place the corporeal above the incorporeal.⁵⁹ For the truth is that the human person is not a duality of body and soul. When God created the human person, His breath animated the dust and it became a single living being.⁶⁰ Perhaps it is for this reason that Victor P. Hamilton writes that, “Any approach that focuses on one aspect

⁵³ *MD*, 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 7. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 9, 10.

⁵⁵ Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human,” 21.

⁵⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* clearly affirms the goodness of both the spiritual (*GS*, 15) and the physical (*ibid*, 13).

⁵⁷ For to do so would render the infinite finite, the perfect imperfect.

⁵⁸ Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament I, Genesis 1-11*, 27. See also, Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human,” 15, 17, 19, 21.

⁵⁹ One ready example of Saint John Paul II’s non-dualistic approach to the human person, especially in regards to their sexuality, is evident in *RBSM*, 36.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Gn* 2:7; 7:22; *Ps* 104:29; *Job* 27:3; 33:4; 34:14-15; *Eze* 37:5.

of man – be that physical, spiritual, or intellectual – to the neglect of the rest of man’s constituent features seems doomed to failure.”⁶¹

As will be seen in the later chapters, this inclusion of the physical in the *imago Dei* directly affects perceptions of what motherhood is and the posture with which it is regarded. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that the *imago Dei* may be present in the corporeal is simultaneously the acknowledgement that sexual difference has objective value, as male corporeality differs from female corporeality.⁶²

1.2.2. *Male and Female He Created Them*

Whilst God created numerous kinds of animals and plants, He only created one sort of humanity. When it comes to the creation of the human person, the author of Genesis 1:26-27 avoids the use of the term “kind,” or, “species.” David W. Cotter, highlights this and iterates that the notion of there being only one sort of humanity stemmed from the Israelite’s monotheistic conception of God.⁶³ It is important to note such, for if there is only one God then there is only one *Imago Dei*. One God, one image, one form of humanity.⁶⁴

It is then interesting to note the layout of verse 27: “So God created Man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” The entirety of humanity bears the image of God. This means that, to some capacity, or rather, in some way, man and woman, male and female, as a collective bear the image of God.⁶⁵ In other words, humanity is actualised in the double mode of male and female.⁶⁶ Repeated twice in the same sentence in verse 26, the author accentuates this

⁶¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 137.

⁶² Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 66-67.

⁶³ Cotter, *Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry. Genesis*, 18. Cf. Ex 8:10, 9:14; Deut 4:35; 6:4; Is 45:5, 18, 22; 46:9; Jer 10:6, 7; Mal 2:10; etc.

⁶⁴ Eph 4:4-6. Cf. 1 Cor 8:6; 12:6.

⁶⁵ Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 11. Graeme Auld also arrives at this conclusion through the undeniably close proximity of the statements, “let Us make Man in Our image and likeness,” and, “male and female He created them.” In light of Genesis 5:1-3, he then moves to offer that, “This may suggest that humans are godlike in being both female and male. That would be a striking statement at the head of a genealogy which links fathers and sons but makes no explicit reference to wives and mothers” (Auld, “Imago Dei in Genesis: Speaking in the Image of God,” 261). See also, Welz, “Imago Dei: References to the Invisible”, 260.

⁶⁶ “So God made *man* in His own image, in the image of God He created *him*.” Placing emphasis on verse 26, this idea of humanity collectively bearing God’s image is evident. See also, Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 64.

truth. Without man, humanity would not bear God's image. Without woman, humanity would not bear God's image.

In the development of doctrine and teaching concerning the *imago Dei*, the Jews originally regarded Adam as the bearer of the divine image, Eve being but a derivation from that image manifest in her counterpart.⁶⁷ It was through Saint Augustine (354–430) that the recognition of sexual difference as belonging in salvation history obtained momentous significance for Western Christianity.⁶⁸ Saint Augustine provides an essentially Platonic interpretation of the creation of the two sexes in Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:7 and 22. His interpretation leads him to conclude that God was resolved to create two sexes – male and female – from the beginning, “the fruit of one single act of creation.”⁶⁹ This conclusion of intentionality in relation to sexuality explains the first creation account's reference to God creating humanity as male and female. Consequently, for woman (as well as, of course, for her counterpart - man), her sex can by no means be deemed a defect; it is natural, and it is an intended part of God's good creation.⁷⁰

In his attempt to explain this creation of two distinct sexes, Saint Gregory of Nyssa held that:

The creation of our nature must in some way have been double; that which renders us like God and that which establishes the division of the sexes. And indeed such an interpretation is suggested by the very order of the account. Scripture says in the first place “God made man; in the image of God, he made him.” Only after that it is added, “He made them male and female,” a division foreign to the divine attributes.”⁷¹

If asking whether or not one can say that the two sexes bear God's image in their distinctness, in light of the above, it would seem that Saint Gregory of Nyssa would answer in the negative. His assertion of such is a conclusion drawn from the rightful recognition of the truth that God is neither physically male nor physically female.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 74.

⁶⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17*, 136.

⁶⁹ Saint Augustine, “City of God,” Book 22, Ch. 17, in *The Works of Saint Augustine (4th Release). Electronic Edition*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock (Charlottesville, Virginia: InteLex Corp, 2014), 1057.

⁷⁰ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 69. See also, Towner, “Clones of God. Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” 345.

⁷¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 28.

Along with the aforementioned case for rationality and free will, it was also this truth that led early Christians to uphold that, as God is sexless, declaring the human soul to likewise be sexless, would make sense of Scripture's disclosing that the sexed human person is created in the image and likeness of a sexless God.⁷²

God is neither male nor female. Yet, in trying to discern the image and likeness of God in humanity (as both male and female), it would seem only logical to turn to the One whose image and likeness they bear in order to try and gain some understanding of sexual distinction within humanity. Even though He Himself is sexless, one of the defining characteristics of God, and something that may aid an understanding of His creation of the two sexes, is the mystery of the Creator's Triune nature.

Male and Female He Created Them Equal

The Old Testament is principally concerned with revealing that God is one.⁷³ Although the divine mystery of God's Trinitarian nature is not explicitly revealed in the Genesis creation accounts, the New Testament reveals "the inscrutable mystery of God's inner life, in which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life... unity in communion."⁷⁴ From this New Testament revelation, new light is thus shed on Genesis' stating that humanity is made in God's image and likeness. This truth is clearly emphasised in *MD* which moves to state that, the human person is rational and free due to its being made in God's image. However, this is not the only way in which humanity bears the image and likeness of God. The call of man and woman to communion is also due to their being made in the *imago Dei*.⁷⁵ Saint John Paul II writes: "Man and woman, created as a 'unity of the two' in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God."⁷⁶

⁷² Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 63.

⁷³ For example, see: Ex 8:10; 9:14; 15:11; Deut 4:35; 6:4; 32:9; 1 Sam 2:2; Is 42:8; 45:5-6; Jer 10:10-11; etc.

⁷⁴ *MD*, 7. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 24-26.

⁷⁵ Janne Haaland Matlary, "Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics," in *Woman and Man*, ed. The pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 338. See also, Agneta Sutton, "The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes: Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and John Paul II," *New Blackfriars* 87, no. 1010 (2006): 433; and, Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human," 30.

⁷⁶ *MD*, 7. See also Sutton, "The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes: Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and John Paul II," 418. As *Gaudium et Spes* expounds: "The root reason for human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God" (*GS*, 19). See also *GS*, 21, 24.

Despite the Creator being an “Us” and despite the Us creating a plurality – male and female - there is but one image of the One God.⁷⁷ In accord with God’s own unified plurality, this image is shared by humanity as a whole, even though humanity is created both male and female.⁷⁸ This is the basis for being able to speak of man and woman as being equal in dignity. There is no distinction here between the image infused in man and the image infused in woman, thus this image is assumed to be the same in both. The Genesis 2 creation account also emphasises this oneness. Eve is taken from Adam.⁷⁹ All that comprises Eve is sourced from Adam. Essentially, they are made of the same “stuff.”⁸⁰

While the creation accounts accentuate that man and woman share the same humanity and together comprise humanity, they further explicate that there indeed also exists profound difference between the two.⁸¹ The first account is the briefest but provides a clear case for the creation of man and woman with equal dignity but as different.⁸² Difference is primarily evident through the creational classifications of “male” and “female.” Together man and woman are a dyad which images the divine Triad.⁸³

Unity is thus a fundamental characteristic that defines humanity’s character. When one reads in Scripture that, “in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them,” they can likewise hear, “in the image of God He created him; “communion” He created them.” The fact that God creates humanity with a communal nature bespeaks a difference between male and female. This truth is directly seen in the nature of the Trinity.⁸⁴ If God was the Father, the Father, and the Father, there would be no relationship possible, for there would only be one “I” – the Father. In

⁷⁷ As in, “Let Us make Man in Our image,” and so He made male and female.

⁷⁸ CCC 292.

⁷⁹ Gn 2:21-23.

⁸⁰ *MD*, 6.

⁸¹ If any conclusions are to be drawn about who woman is and about her vocation as mother, it is relevant that the precise differences between male and female be elucidated. For if man and woman are essentially the same, only different in external appearances, then talking about woman as having a particular vocation to motherhood would be fruitless.

⁸² Blanca Castilla de Cortazar sums this up in saying, “The divine image in the human being has traits of the divine intimacy that include, among others, unity and plurality combined, and difference tied to equality.” Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 65. See also, Sutton, “The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes: Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and John Paul II,” 418, 21-24.

⁸³ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 63.

⁸⁴ The Catechism offers a succinct description of how this is so. See, CCC 254.

order for there to be communion, an “I” needs another “I” who is like in nature but not exactly the same.⁸⁵

Thus, a paradox of sorts is realised. The relationship between male and female, being created in the image of their communal God, must simultaneously be characterised by difference as well as likeness.⁸⁶ This likeness, so termed, is perhaps more known by its modern counterpart: “equality.”⁸⁷ Being like/equal in nature is the foundation of communion.⁸⁸ From the Genesis 1 account one can conclude that, just as with the Trinity, the origins of male and female are simultaneous, bespeaking of the equality that is foundational for full communion.⁸⁹

In her article, “Equality, Gender, and John Paul II,” R. Mary Hayden Lemmons fittingly asks, “Must all forms of equality obliterate all differences? Or, is it possible for there to be an equality of difference?”⁹⁰ This thesis would answer that it is not only possible, but it is entirely necessary. For this communal image of God to make any sense and to have any endurance, two like but distinct “I’s” must exist. Thus, if for nothing else but to allow any reference to humanity imaging the Divine Communion to be viable, equality cannot mean sameness.⁹¹ It is thus no wonder that Genesis 1:27 does not read as: “With the choice to be male or/and female, or whatever they so desire to be, He created them.”⁹² The creation accounts hence assert that the human person’s

⁸⁵ Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 21-23.

⁸⁶ L. F. Harrington and L. Cervantes affirm this when, in their article on the nature of woman, they write: “Reason teaches that the identical human nature appears in the male and female in two different forms” (L. F. Cervantes & L. Harrington, “Woman,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 812).

⁸⁷ Here “equality” is used in the true sense of the word, that is, bespeaking, not a sameness of natures, but a sameness of dignity. Amnon Shapira similarly concludes that Genesis 1:27, “male and female He created them,” is a defence of equality. (Amnon Shapira, “On Woman’s Equal Standing in the Bible - a Sketch: A Feminist Re-Reading of the Hebrew Bible: A Typological View,” *Hebrew Studies* 51 (2010): 15).

⁸⁸ Margaret McCarthy touches on sexual difference as a manner of speaking about difference within the Trinity. Margaret McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” *Ave Maria Law Review*, 8 (2009-2010): 143-46.

⁸⁹ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 69.

⁹⁰ R. Mary Hayden Lemmons, “Equality, Gender, and John Paul II,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 5, no. 3 (2002): 112. This notion of the relationship between equality and difference will be looked at later, especially in relation to the question of woman’s involvement in the professional sphere.

⁹¹ McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 152.

⁹² Despite this seemingly controversial statement, it is intended that this thesis, as much as it is able, avoids stepping into the great ocean of current gender debates. Hence no further elaboration will be made here.

body and nature objectively condition their way of being a person.⁹³ It is from this foundation of ontological difference that this thesis can move forward to ask what then distinguishes woman from her male counterpart and why it is so important that she bears these differences.

Male and Female, He Created Them Different

The Genesis 1 account is brief, yet even in its brevity, it reveals that humanity is created and comprised of male and female.⁹⁴ It reveals both equality and difference, although it sheds no light on what this difference might entail. The Genesis 2 account, on the other hand, in its description of the creation of humanity speaks separately of male and female.

The Genesis 2 account of humanity's creation seems to bespeak a sense of woman being subordinated to man.⁹⁵ Man was created first, and for at least a short period of time before the creation of woman - enough time to till and keep the land, as well as name all the animals.⁹⁶ In addition to this, woman was created out of man, and as a "help" for man, seeming to ascribe to man a sense of primacy as well as superiority. It is for these reasons that Tina Beattie moves to say that Eve being created from Adam in this second account of creation is, and has been, used to uphold androcentric philosophies and patriarchal social structures which accede primacy to the male.⁹⁷ However, in regard to the two accounts, one must heed the words of *MD*, that, "nevertheless, we find no essential contradiction between the two texts."⁹⁸

⁹³ Attilio Danese and Giulia Paola Di Nicola, "Woman and Man: Created One for the Other," in *Woman and Man*, ed. The Pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 105.

⁹⁴ *MD*, 6.

⁹⁵ Shapira, "On Woman's Equal Standing in the Bible - a Sketch: A Feminist Re-Reading of the Hebrew Bible: A Typological View," 17. Amnon Shapira also notes here that woman being created second has recently been employed by feminist commentary to assert that woman, on account of her being created last, must be the pinnacle of creation, "a more advanced and developed "model" of man." Neither of these extremes offer an interpretation that is satisfactorily in line with the equality between male and female as evident in the Genesis 1 account.

⁹⁶ Gn 2:15-20.

⁹⁷ Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 51.

⁹⁸ See, *MD*, 6, and Mary Phil Korsak, "Eve, Malignant or Maligned?" *Cross Currents*, 44, no. 453-458 (1994): 454, for an explanation of the different literary forms of the two Genesis creation accounts. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 9.

A deeper look at the second creation account soon reveals that what is written in no way belittles woman, although it most definitely does speak of there existing differences between male and female.⁹⁹ The creation account in Genesis 2 initially does this by providing the reader with a brief consideration of what is not good for man juxtaposed with what is good for him. Man experiences isolation, original solitude, in response to which God declares: “It is not good that the man should be alone.”¹⁰⁰ The detriment of solitude is further accentuated by the following scenario in which all the animals are brought before man, but none were found that were like in nature to himself.¹⁰¹

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”¹⁰² The Hebrew word used here for “helper” - *ezer* - means “help,” “support,” “aid,” or “succour.”¹⁰³ Interestingly, David W. Cotter notes that this “help” described goes beyond the basic notion of lending a hand, as might be inferred today. Instead, it speaks of a special kind of divine help which is of a personal nature. This help is the type of help received when confronted with the danger of impending death, in order that this danger may be overcome.¹⁰⁴

The danger that man faces is solitude. It indeed is not good for man to be alone. This solitude is a real and innate sense of incompleteness. Why is this solitude a danger? Well, first and foremost, simply because God Himself said that it is so. Through the creation accounts, the reader is constantly hearing the voice of God declare that His creative works are good. But this aspect of creation is now confronted with a negative assertion: it is not good. Solitude is the only aspect of creation that God declares “not good.”¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 151

¹⁰⁰ Gn 2:18. See also *GS*, 12.

¹⁰¹ Gn 2:19-20.

¹⁰² Gn 2:18.

¹⁰³ The same root of this Hebrew word can also mean strength, as *ezer* appears in equivalence with *oz*, meaning “strength” in Psalm 46:2, and the names of Azariah (meaning, “The Lord is my help”) and Uzziah (meaning, “The Lord is my strength”), in 2 Kings 14:21 and 2 Chronicles 26:1, which are in fact both references to the same king. (Cotter, *Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry. Genesis*, 31.)

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ For an alternative view see, Balthasar, *supra note* 16, at 373. As cited in McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 150.) See also Korsak, “Eve, Malignant or Maligned?” 455; and Shapira, “On Woman’s Equal Standing in the Bible - a Sketch: A Feminist Re-Reading of the Hebrew Bible: A Typological View,” 13.

From this interpretation, one can glean an even deeper understanding of who woman is and her essential contribution to humanity as a whole. Without woman, man would not be truly human, as man cannot constitute humanity all on his own. It is for this reason that Margaret McCarthy writes: “He is *from the beginning* unthinkable without the woman”¹⁰⁶ She and he are both created in God’s image with corresponding strengths essential to the other and without which the other would perish. “From the very beginning they appear as a ‘unity of the two’, and this signifies that the original solitude is overcome.”¹⁰⁷

The solution is for God to provide help, but it must be a help which is *kenegdo*, meaning “appropriate” or “fit.”¹⁰⁸ Literally, *kenegdo* means something like “in front of him.”¹⁰⁹ What the author would be emphasising then, through this choice of vocabulary, is that the nature of help that will save man from the death of solitude must be something that is simultaneously suitable but different. None of the animals are like enough to save him from solitude, he needs something “appropriate”/ “fit”, but, at the same time, something that is not of the same nature as him, but “in front of him,” a position of dialogue and communion.¹¹⁰ In addition to this interpretation of *ezer kenegdo*, Saint Edith Stein iterates that the Hebrew literally translates to “a helper as if vis-à-vis to him.”¹¹¹ This interpretation emphasises mutuality.

Saint Edith Stein hence proposes that man and woman are like mirrors for each other.¹¹² Their reflection is not identical, yet in each other they can look upon human nature. Saint John Paul II would carry this one step farther to suggest that herein is where the fundamental human aspect of self-gift comes into play (a crucial part of the nature of the human person and the Christian concept of motherhood, that will be explored later). Woman is not a part of man, but a counterpart to him, for him.¹¹³ They

¹⁰⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory,” vol. 2, in *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans, Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 373, as referenced in: McCarthy, ““Something Not to Be Grasped”: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 136.

¹⁰⁷ *MD*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Cotter, *Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry. Genesis*, 30.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 31.

¹¹⁰ *GS*, 13.

¹¹¹ Stein, *Woman*, 59.

¹¹² *Ibid*.

¹¹³ Korsak, “Eve, Malignant or Maligned?” 457.

do indeed bear great likeness to each other, yet not entirely. Rather, they complement each other, as, for example, one hand does the other.¹¹⁴

Adam, himself, testifies to the equality between male and female. The first one hears from man in Scripture is an affirmation of the dignity of woman. When Adam beholds Eve for the first time, he recognises more than just likeness to his own self, but a person of the same nature as himself.¹¹⁵ “Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” It is almost as if he is saying, “At last, me.” Yet, whilst there is this recognition of sameness, there is also a recognition of difference: “She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.”¹¹⁶ Man and woman exist mutually for the other as well as mutually for the other. “Woman must ‘help’ the man – and in his turn he must help her – first of all by the very fact of their ‘being human persons’.”¹¹⁷ In beholding woman, man was able to see that which was in himself.¹¹⁸ And hence the foundational premise is realised: that the human person, can only truly discover itself through a sincere gift of its own person.¹¹⁹ This is a prelude to the definitive self-revelation of the Triune God: a living unity in the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹²⁰

Indeed, to state that humanity is created in God’s image and likeness is to state that each person is called to exist for someone other than himself or herself.¹²¹ This Trinitarian image of God in humanity would be direly distorted if woman was subordinate to man, for domination leaves no room for the mutuality and love that is necessary for communion.¹²² Thus there can be no question of God creating man to

¹¹⁴ Indeed as L. F. Cervantes and L. Harrington observe, every cell of the female body is distinguishable from every cell of a male’s body due to their differential chromosomal content (Harrington and Cervantes, “Woman,” 812-13). Nonetheless, it must be noted that this complementarity is not simply biological but includes the totality of the human person. (Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 338.)

¹¹⁵ Harrington and Cervantes, “Woman,” 812.

¹¹⁶ Gn 2:23; Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis*, 1.29.2, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 27. See also *MD*, 6.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Korsak, “Eve, Malignant or Maligned?” 457.

¹¹⁹ *GS*, 24. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 35-36, 38-41, 43-46. See also, *GS*, 24, and, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, 135 (P.S. Falla trans., Harper & Row, 1980) (1972), as cited in Sr. Prudence Allen, “Mulieris Dignitatem Twenty Years Later: An Overview of the Document and Challenges,” *Ave Maria Law Review* 8, no. 13 (2009-2010): 20.

¹²⁰ *MD*, 7.

¹²¹ *Ibid*. And later it will be seen how woman’s gift of self must extend also to children and those under her care.

¹²² Gn 3:16. Zamfir, “The Quest for the “Eternal Feminine”: An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman,” 505. This will be further addressed later in this chapter. But, for now, note also that this is why it is imperative that one returns to the beginning in order to see the true and intended relationship between man and woman. If one looks but at historical experience in order

dominate over woman. This unity of man and woman resembles a likeness to the divine interpersonal communion of the Trinity.¹²³ Consequently, Saint John Paul II notes that, “This likeness is an endowment of man and woman’s personal beings, but it is also a call and a duty.”¹²⁴ He then writes:

Is it only a question here of a “helper” in activity, in “subduing the earth” (cf. *Gen 1: 28*)? Certainly it is a matter of a life’s companion, with whom, as a wife, the man can unite himself, becoming with her “one flesh” and for this reason leaving “his father and his mother” (cf. *Gen 2:24*). Thus in the same context as the creation of man and woman, the biblical account speaks of God’s *instituting marriage* as an indispensable condition for the transmission of life to new generations, the transmission of life to which marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordered: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (*Gen 1:28*).¹²⁵

Given that male and female reveal the image of God in unique, but in complementary ways, sexual difference thus has purpose. It is not a foreign idea in ancient literature to uphold that man was initially created bisexual, with the sexes being differentiated only further down the track.¹²⁶ Victor P. Hamilton moves to conclude that such is clearly not the case here in the Genesis accounts.¹²⁷ Sexuality is not an accident of nature, a mere anatomical anomaly, or something bestowed simply for the purpose of propagation. Sexuality and sexual difference is a gift of God.¹²⁸ Consequently, the Genesis accounts emphasise that, while sexual identity and sexual function are alien to God’s incorporeal nature, they are nonetheless unquestionably a part of His divine will for those that bear His image – man and woman.¹²⁹ The divine image thus transcends sexual difference but is somehow still mysteriously present in it.

to gain an understanding of how man and woman relate to each other, one sees only conflict (McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 136-37).

¹²³ Woman is man’s companion and helpmate, at the same time man clings to woman, and together they become one flesh. Gn 2:24. Cf. Mt 19:5; Mk 10:6-12; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31.

¹²⁴ *MD*, 7.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

¹²⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17*, 138.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

¹²⁹ Towner, “Clones of God. Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” 345.

1.2.3. *Go Forth and Multiply*

The first passage of Scripture which directly concerns humanity is one mutually assigning man and woman a threefold common vocation: to bear God's image and likeness, to be fruitful and multiply, and to be masters over the earth.¹³⁰ It is not stated in this passage that this threefold vocation is to be effected in different ways by man and woman; at best, this is implied in the quotation cited on the separation of the sexes.¹³¹ Thus, again, there is this coexistence of community and individuality, of likeness and of difference. Man and woman have this shared threefold vocation, but what does this entail, on a personal level, for woman? How is she as an individual, distinctly different from man, called to live out the vocation to bear the *imago Dei*, as well as that of fruitfulness and multiplication?

After creating humanity as a communion of male and female, God's first communication to humanity after its creation is thus the command to propagate and have dominion over the earth.¹³² God specifically tasks humanity with two assignments: procreation and dominion. Saint Augustine, identifies the three goods of marriage as *bonum prolis* (offspring), *bonum fidei* (fidelity), and *bonum sacramenti* (permanence).¹³³ When speaking in relation to *bonum prolis*, Saint Augustine iterates that, "If one should ask why it was necessary that a helper be made for man, the answer that seems most probable is that it was for the procreation for children..."¹³⁴ The conclusion that Saint Augustine appears to be aiming at is that the sexes were created with the exclusive purpose of making procreation possible. Such a denouement seems to unsatisfactorily rule out the validity of any discussion on the unique ways in which the sexes can be said to bear the *imago Dei*. Not being able to speak of the sexes in this way also generates an inability to speak of their being distinct masculine and feminine vocations beyond of the physical procreation of children.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Gn 1:28.

¹³¹ Stein, *Woman*, 59. Gn 1:27.

¹³² To: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

¹³³ His cogitation of the three goods of marriage can be primarily found in: Saint Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali and De sancta Virginitate*, general ed. Henry Chadwick, trans. and notes, P.G. Walsh. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2-63.

¹³⁴ Saint Augustine, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, 9.3.5-6, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 28.

¹³⁵ This quote from Saint Augustine to which this footnote belongs has not been cited here as a representation of Saint Augustine's views on sexual difference or the purpose of procreation, but as a representation of the general argument that the sexes were created with the sole purpose of procreation.

Nonetheless, Agneta Sutton makes it clear that Saint John Paul II, alongside other writers such as Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar, rule out the dual creation of humanity as male and female as serving merely the biological purpose of reproduction.¹³⁶ “Duality does not close in on itself but transcends it. From the ‘unity of the two’ fruitfulness blossoms forth.”¹³⁷ The two tasks of procreation and dominion seem to be the means presented by which humanity is practically called to live out its primary vocation to bear the *imago Dei*.¹³⁸

Whilst the creation accounts of humanity seem to place the human person at the forefront of creation, even above it to some degree, being created in the image of God has natural limits.¹³⁹ Man and woman may freely unite as one in the act of sexual intercourse, yet it is God who makes their union fruitful.¹⁴⁰ One can see such also proclaimed by the psalmist, “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward.”¹⁴¹ This reality is affirmed through the fact that the first genealogy of the Bible begins with God, and the last ends with Him.¹⁴² Victor P. Hamilton offers that creation motifs existent in both Mesopotamia and Canaan were frequently used in fertility rites.¹⁴³ In direct confrontation to this, Genesis 1:28 could thus be emphasising that reproduction is indeed a direct blessing from God, not something reliant or conditional upon subsequent rites or other rituals.¹⁴⁴ “With creation, God does not abandon His creatures to themselves. He not only gives them being and existence, but

¹³⁶ Sutton, “The Complementarity and Symbolism of the Two Sexes: Karl Barth, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and John Paul II,” 418, 33. This view of Agneta Sutton’s seems to be consistent with the theology of the creation of humanity as presented in *Mulieris Dignitatem*. See also *GS*, 50.

¹³⁷ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 72.

¹³⁸ For God is Creator: (Gn 1-2. Cf. Ps 102:25-27; Jn 1:3, 10; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 2:10; etc.) and, He is Sovereign: (Cf. Ps 22:28; 47:7,8; Jer 10:7; Zec 14:9; etc.).

¹³⁹ Cf. Deut 8:17-18; Job 38:25; 39:29-30; Ps 8; Heb 2:7, 9.

¹⁴⁰ It is for this reason that upon the birth of Cain, the first birth recorded in Scripture, Eve - the “mother of all living” – cries: “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord” (Gn 4:1). Pamela J. Scalise, “‘I Have Produced a Man with the Lord’: God as Provider of Offspring in Old Testament Theology,” *Review and Expositor* 91 (1994): 577.

¹⁴¹ Ps 127:3. Cf. Gn 33:5; 48:4; Deut 7:13; Ps 113:9; Is 8:18; etc. See also, David S. Shapiro, “Be Fruitful and Multiply,” *A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 22: 45-46.

¹⁴² Gn 5:3 and Luke 3:38. For an expounded analysis of these two genealogies and what they individually and collectively reveal about the nature of the *imago Dei*, see Gavin Ortlund, “Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 57:4 (Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue).

¹⁴³ See also, Scalise, “‘I Have Produced a Man with the Lord’: God as Provider of Offspring in Old Testament Theology,” 578.

¹⁴⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17*, 139. See also, E. H. Peters, “Eve,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 483.

also, and at every moment, upholds and sustains them in being, enables them to act and brings them to their final end.”¹⁴⁵ God is thus affirmed to be the beginning and end of life.¹⁴⁶

The essence of God’s blessing is the capacity to be fertile, to reproduce oneself.¹⁴⁷ In the immediate sense, this divine blessing seems to simply be a necessary element of creation. God created the world and now requires animals to reproduce and fill it. Yet, God could have elected to fill the earth Himself. One might suggest that perhaps, then, this blessing is given for the sustainment and continuity of the species He had created. However, the word choice in this pericope is clear. God commands the animals, as well as man and woman to “fill” their given habitats, “fill” inferring a sense of abundance and satisfaction.¹⁴⁸

Whilst it is most apparent that fruitfulness and multiplication are divine imperatives, one cannot dismiss the beginning of the verse, “And God blessed them...” Pamela J. Scalise presents six reasons revealed in the Old Testament why offspring were seen to be “needed” in biblical Hebrew culture: 1. to work the ground; 2. the provision of care for elderly parents; 3. to perform funerary rites; 4. to perform tasks that need to be accomplished for the sustainment of the larger community; 5. to carry on one’s line, for posterity; and, 6. to bring honour. Pamela J. Scalise also notes that in some narratives these factors are given great weight, whilst in others, they are absent or somehow portrayed as less is always emphasised.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, the determination of fruitfulness and multiplication as being blessed is not the result of what it can achieve or of the benefits it can provide. Instead, this determination must come from a preeminent factor/source which preordains its nature as blessed. In other words, these examples given by Pamela J. Scalise illustrate what is revealed in Genesis 1:28, namely, that fruitfulness and multiplication is not merely a blessing but is, in and of itself, blessed.

¹⁴⁵ CCC 301.

¹⁴⁶ This truth is beautifully revealed by the mother of the seven martyred brothers in 2 Maccabees (2 Macc 7:22-21, 27-28). In specific relation to fecundity, see also, Scalise, “‘I Have Produced a Man with the Lord’: God as Provider of Offspring in Old Testament Theology,” 578; and, Jason S. Derouchie, “The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 56, no. 2 (June 2013): 227.

¹⁴⁷ Shapiro, “Be Fruitful and Multiply,” 43. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 35-38.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Ex 15:9; Lev 25:19; Deut 26:12; 2 Chr 5:14; Neh 9:25; Ps 17:14; Prov 3:10, 7:18; Is 27:6; etc.

¹⁴⁹ Scalise, “‘I have Produced a Man with the Lord’: God as provider of Offspring in Old Testament Theology,” 580-81.

Blessing is antecedent of imperative. This idea of fruitfulness and multiplication being a blessing goes hand-in-hand with what was said earlier about the goodness of God and the goodness of His creation.¹⁵⁰ In the creation accounts, God's deeming something "blessed" seems to be an extension, or a natural progression of affirmation beyond His deeming something "good." The first time the word "blessed" is used is in Genesis 1:22 is where soliloquy gives way to direct speech. God is no longer talking about creation as such but is speaking to creation. Just as He did with marine life and the birds of the air in verse 22, God also bestows upon the human person the power to procreate.

The verse immediately following the revelation of humanity's dignity, personhood, and sexual difference, is that of God's command to them to be fruitful and multiply. A connection between the two is thus established. It is as if God is saying, "This is who the human person is, and now this is how he is." Perhaps the greatest blessing of this imperative to be fruitful and multiply is in the transmission of the divine image that humanity was created in. As Saint John Paul II in *MD* states:

This image and likeness of God, which is essential for the human being, is passed on by the man and woman, as spouses and parents, to their descendants: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (*Gen 1: 28*).¹⁵¹

MD also makes a point of mentioning the way in which the Old Testament metaphorically refers to God with father-like and mother-like qualities, pointing indirectly to the divine mystery of eternal generation.¹⁵² This generation differs to that of the generation of life possible between man and woman. The most essential difference is that God is pure spirit, and thus possesses neither feminine nor masculine physical qualities. Despite humanity being anything but divine, possessing finite qualities such as corporeality, *MD* still urges that, "We must nevertheless seek in God the absolute model of all 'generation' among human beings."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 578.

¹⁵¹ *MD*, 6.

¹⁵² Ibid, 8. Cf. Eph 3:14-15. For a counter opinion, see, Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 157, 158, 162.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

“All ‘generating’ in the created world is to be likened to this absolute and uncreated model,” that is, the model of the Trinity.¹⁵⁴ The power to procreate is a possession of at least a reflection of the divine power to give life. As Victor P. Hamilton notes, “There must be some aspect of the divine being that desires community, that needs to share itself.”¹⁵⁵ The marked difference between human generation and the generation that occurs among the rest of creation is the communal element of the *imago Dei*: the extremely personal giving of self. Man and woman give themselves to each other freely and entirely and, in turn, they give themselves freely and entirely to the fruit of their self-gift.¹⁵⁶ Every element of human generation is hence marked by likeness to the fruitful intimacy of the Trinity.¹⁵⁷ For man, this is termed “fatherhood.” For woman, this is termed “motherhood.” For man, fatherhood cannot be separated from eternal generation. Likewise, for woman, motherhood cannot be separated from eternal generation.¹⁵⁸ To be a mother thus images the nature of God.¹⁵⁹

God’s blessing of fecundity hence functions in such a way that humanity becomes able to bless in return through the transmission of God’s divine image.¹⁶⁰ Genesis 5:3 alludes to an association between a father/child relationship and the *imago Dei*.¹⁶¹ God creates man (Adam) in His own image and likeness, and then Adam creates Seth in his own image and likeness.¹⁶² This connection between the *imago Dei*, creating, and

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Cotter, *Berit Olam. Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry. Genesis*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 338. See also Finlayson, “Guardians of Spousal and Maternal Love,” 390.

¹⁵⁷ This intimate fruitfulness was clearly expressed at the Council of Florence in 1438. See, Council of Florence: (1439): DS 1300-1301. As cited in CCC 246. To some degree, one can gain a sense of this unity in Origen who wrote: “Our inner man consists of spirit and soul. The spirit is said to be male; the soul can be called female. If these have accord and agreement between themselves, they increase and multiply by the very accord among themselves...” Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 1.15. Similarly, in consideration of Genesis 5:3, it becomes apparent that - this idea of fruitfulness and multiplication cannot be limited to just the physical or just the spiritual, as seems to be the preference of most in Western society today. (Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 71.)

¹⁵⁸ *MD*, 8. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 52-55.

¹⁵⁹ Yet, while woman (and man) can image God in this blessed capacity, such is not possible without the other. “In the human order, generation is proper to the ‘unity of the two’: both are “parents,” the man and the woman alike” (ibid). Again, one can say that man and woman bear the image of God as a collective, as a union, as humanity.

¹⁶⁰ Gn 1:28; 2:3; 5:2; 9:11; 12:2, 3; 14:16, 20; 22:17; 24:1; 25:11; etc.

¹⁶¹ See also, Ortlund, “Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue,” 677.

¹⁶² Gn 5:3. It is interesting to note that, whilst Seth is said to be made in Adam’s “own image and likeness,” Cain is not. Seth is righteous and his line produces such as Enoch (Gn 5:18-24. Cf. Sir 44:16; 49:14; Heb 11:5) and Noah (Gn 5:29. Cf. Gn 6:8-10, 22; Ezk 14:14; Sir 44:17; 2 Pet 2:5). Cain is not and his line produces unrighteous men, polygamists and murders, such as Lamech (Gn 4:18-19, 23-24). From Cain’s line also comes the Nephilim, “Nephilim” deriving from the Hebrew word *naphal*, meaning, “to fall.” However, Gavin Ortlund also makes the point of clarifying that one should not draw too stark a contrast between Seth and Cain when it comes to the *imago Dei*. He writes,

begetting seems to also be affirmed by the genealogy in Luke 3:38. Christ is traced back to “Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.”

Gavin Ortlund asserts that it is interesting to pay heed to the fact that Seth was not said to be created in God’s image and likeness, but in the image and likeness of Adam. Thus, “as was God to Adam, so is *Adam* to Seth.”¹⁶³ Moreover, he observes that this appears to be an odd way to simply speak of the continuation of the *imago Dei*, unless, the text of course wishes to make apparent a parallel between God’s creating and Adam’s procreating.¹⁶⁴ In the Genesis 5:3 account of Seth’s birth, one thus also sees procreation as a means by which humanity can be said to bear God’s image and likeness. This is affirmed by the proximity of the reiteration of humanity being created in God’s image and likeness,¹⁶⁵ and Seth being born in Adam’s image and likeness.¹⁶⁶ Motherhood is thus a means of both participating in and proliferating the *imago Dei*.

Both of the creation accounts thus impart important theological truths about the human person and humanity’s creation as both male and female.¹⁶⁷ So far, through this brief and select overview of the two Genesis creation accounts, it has been made apparent that: humanity - male and female - being created by God, is very good; humanity bears the *imago Dei* - male and female collectively as humanity, but also individually as two distinct sexes; man and woman are equal in dignity and humanity, yet somehow different by virtue of their masculinity and femininity.

1.3. *Eve: Mother of All Life*

What then is this difference? How does woman bear the *imago Dei* in a manner that man does not, and what does this then reveal about the Christian concept of motherhood? To discern the Christian concept of motherhood, it seems reasonable to begin by looking at the first woman – Eve. This segment will thus look to Eve, not so much as the individual called “Eve,” but to her as the first woman.

“Nowhere is it suggested that true humanity continues only through Seth, or that Cain and his descendants are precluded from the *imago Dei*” (Ortlund, “Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue,” 679). Saint John Paul II’s earlier conclusion that sin does not eradicate but diminishes and obscures the image and likeness of God in humanity is thus affirmed.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 679.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 678.

¹⁶⁵ Gn 5:1-2.

¹⁶⁶ Gn 5:3.

¹⁶⁷ *MD*, 6.

Tina Beattie turns to the creation accounts in her efforts to discern the figures of Eve and Mary and the means by which they have been misinterpreted in ways to serve as validation for cultural ideologies of sexual inequality.¹⁶⁸ Such misinterpretations, she claims, are the result of Genesis 1-3 being an “indeterminate text” open to numerous interpretations about the meaning of the body and the theological significance concerning God’s creating humanity with sexual difference.¹⁶⁹ With the intention of developing such a theology herself, she then returns to these two figures, urging that, “Any attempt to explore the meaning of sexual difference in the Christian story entails a return to Genesis,”¹⁷⁰ and, more particularly that, “Any attempt to reclaim the symbolic significance of the female body as person in the Christian theological narrative must focus to a large extent on the figure of Eve.”¹⁷¹ This is primarily so as she upholds that the Church only possesses androcentric constructions of Eve (and Mary) which are, by nature, damaging to women.¹⁷² Thus, Tina Beattie’s insistence on a feminine, theological return to Eve.

However, beyond the fact that Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein clearly disprove Tina Beattie’s generalisation, it is not feasible to exclusively look at Eve as a type of woman.¹⁷³ Beyond the narratives of her creation, something already looked at, one does not hear of Eve except in relation to the Fall and the events that followed. Hence, Eve will be looked at in relation to Mary. In the following section, efforts will first be made to look at and understand Eve as “mother of living,” a title bestowed on Eve after the Fall. This thesis will then touch upon original sin the context in which this title was given to Eve. Doing so will enable a fuller understanding of this title bestowed on Eve. It is also necessary to look at original sin in order to understand why there are and have been misconceptions regarding Eve and hence also of woman.

¹⁶⁸ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 52; McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 47.

¹⁶⁹ Here, in speaking of misinterpretations, she speaks nonspecifically. Claus Westermann also speaks of the reality of exegetes constantly offering new interpretations when it comes to Genesis 2-3. (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 186.

¹⁷⁰ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 45.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 20-22.

¹⁷³ That Saint John Paul II’s and Saint Edith Stein’s interpretations of Eve are anything but androcentric is readily seen throughout this chapter.

1.3.1. And the Man Called His Wife Eve

When looking to Eve as a type of woman, attention is given to Eve's participation in the Fall. Yet, Eve reveals more about femininity than just general human weakness. Looking to her as a type of woman, even after the event of the Fall, one can glean an understanding of the Christian concept of motherhood.

It is interesting to note that Eve only receives her title "the mother of all living" after God has made apparent what the consequences of the misuse of their freewill were.¹⁷⁴ This title is one given by Adam: "The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."¹⁷⁵ In giving this title to Eve, Adam essentially seems to be highlighting motherhood as the distinguishing characteristic of his counterpart. In light of the prophecy just given about the Redeemer being the seed of the woman a few verses earlier, this title does not seem to be Adam reducing Eve to her ability to have children, but an affirmation of woman's dignity and vocation.¹⁷⁶

Adam's naming woman "Eve" (*hawwa*) immediately calls to mind his earlier naming of the animals.¹⁷⁷ Here it thus initially seems that the consequences of the Fall are already in effect as Adam appears to be relating to woman in the same manner that he prior related to the animals.¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, it does not seem to be the case that man now treats or views woman as he views the animals, for the name he gives Eve is, in its essence, "life."

The first name given to the first woman is "the mother of all living." The most obvious proposition for this name being given is that the entirety of humanity will derive from her fruitfulness. Every person will, in a sense, be Eve's child. Yet, even then, she is titled mother before any mention of her giving birth. The first one hears of such is in the following chapter when she gives birth to Cain.¹⁷⁹ But, here in Genesis 3, she is already called "mother." Her name is not "she will be the mother of all living," but "the mother of all living."

¹⁷⁴ Korsak, "Eve, Malignant or Maligned?" 460.

¹⁷⁵ Gn 3:20.

¹⁷⁶ Gn 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel."

¹⁷⁷ Peters, "Eve," 482.

¹⁷⁸ Gn 2:19-20.

¹⁷⁹ Gn 4:1.

Alongside the description of the negative consequences to be faced due to the misuse of freewill, here is this seemingly out of place positive affirmation of woman.¹⁸⁰ In spite of humanity's sin and disobedience, God's original command to humanity to be fruitful and multiply is not withdrawn or made inviolable.¹⁸¹ In this sense, Adam's naming of Eve bespeaks hope for the future despite the direness of their present circumstances.¹⁸² In the midst of death, there is "life." And perhaps this life that Adam refers to is not just limited to the hope of future generations, but another affirmation of the "help" that woman is to him. This interpretation flows on cohesively from the earlier comments made about woman being the strength and aid man needs to extricate him from the peril of isolation. The consequences of sin, as described by God Himself in Genesis 3, are suffering and eventually death: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."¹⁸³ Yet, even after all of this, man looks at woman and says, "life."

Victor P. Hamilton states that there are numerous etymological possibilities as to what the name "Eve" actually means. Regardless, she, as the first woman, is given the name mother.¹⁸⁴ This seems most of all to be an affirmation of the natural vocation of woman to motherhood. It also seems to speak of the esteemed dignity of motherhood itself.

Woman as Mother

In his affirmation of Eve, the first woman and a type of woman, Adam affirms that woman is mother. St John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein then expound both how this is so and what this entails. As aforementioned, the fact that the human person is created in the *imago Dei* means that they are called to exist for others through the gifting of their person wholly to another. Discovery of self is hence only accomplished through a sincere gift of self.¹⁸⁵ This is especially so for woman whose nature compels her to

¹⁸⁰ Korinna Zamfir affirms that this title given to Eve and all of its connotations are essentially positive. Zamfir, "The Quest for the "Eternal Feminine": An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman," 505.

¹⁸¹ Peters, "Eve," 482.

¹⁸² Derouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," 228. This interpretation fits with Claus Westermann's speaking of Israelite primeval stories are simultaneously retrospective and looking forward to the history of the people of God. (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 65-66.) See also p.81 where he speaks of the relationship between the beginning and the end of the biblical narratives.

¹⁸³ Gn 3:19. Cf. Gn 2:7; 18:27; Job 34:15; Ps 90:3; Ecc 3:20; 12:7; 1 Cor 15:47. For more on the consequences of the fall, see Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 253ff.

¹⁸⁴ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17*, 204-07.

¹⁸⁵ *MD*, 7. See also Jn 13:34; 15:13; 1 Jn 3:11, 16; 4:7-8, 11.

give herself to those around her. In agreement, Paola Di Giulia and Danese Attilio state that, “The relationality of the human being is more clearly manifest in a woman’s body.”¹⁸⁶ As Saint Edith Stein furthers:

Only the person blinded by the passion of controversy could deny that woman in soul and body is formed for a particular purpose. The clear and irrevocable word of Scripture declares that what daily experience teaches us from the beginning of the world: woman is destined to be wife and mother.¹⁸⁷

Beyond Adam’s affirmation, such a conclusion is reached first and foremost by simply looking at woman.¹⁸⁸ The physical differences are of course most obvious. Even the child conceived out of sight cannot remain hidden for long. The external growth of a pregnant woman’s belly reveals an internal reality: that woman is not just physically different to man but also spiritually different. She is naturally inclined to move towards the embracing, cherishing, nourishing, and flourishing of others. Saint Edith Stein terms this innate desire of woman as her “natural, maternal yearning.”¹⁸⁹ The natural, maternal yearning of woman can also be seen in the Scriptural metaphors of God as mother.

In *MD*, Saint John Paul II makes note of some of the instances in which God is metaphorically referred to as having maternal qualities. He does this primarily in order to highlight that, to metaphorically refer to God, not just as a father, but also as a mother, testifies to both man and woman being made in His likeness. “If there is a likeness between Creator and creatures, it is understandable that the Bible would refer to God using expressions that attribute to him both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities.”¹⁹⁰ The passages of Scripture that use such metaphors thus indirectly confirm the truth that man and woman, not just as humanity, but also in the uniqueness of their sexes, are created in the image and likeness of God.

The Scriptural passages that contain such maternal metaphors also indirectly affirm the qualities that woman possesses but man does not. In accord with the earlier observations of Saint Edith Stein, these Scriptural metaphors reveal that woman innately bears maternal qualities resulting in her tendency towards compassion,

¹⁸⁶ Danese and Di Nicola, “Woman and Man: Created One for the Other,” 105.

¹⁸⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 43.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *MD*, 8.

comforting, nurturing, and selfless love.¹⁹¹ Woman extends her care in concrete ways to the living and the personal by protecting and encouraging wholeness.¹⁹² She aspires to this totality, this self-fulfillment in herself and in others, seeking always personal betterment for all. This total and empathetic sharing in the life of another person is woman's gift and happiness.¹⁹³

1.3.2. *Original Sin*

*In its essence, however, sin is a negation of God as Creator in his relationship to man, and of what God wills for man, from the beginning and forever. Creating man and woman in his own image and likeness, God wills for them the fullness of good, or supernatural happiness, which flows from sharing in his own life. By committing sin man rejects this gift and at the same time wills to become "as God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5), that is to say, deciding what is good and what is evil independently of God, his Creator.*¹⁹⁴

When humanity chose to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, a fundamental break in unity was brought about.¹⁹⁵ A break between the unity between humanity and its Creator, between the human person and their fellow human person, and between humanity and the rest of creation.¹⁹⁶ And so creation fell due to the sin of humanity and was thus diminished, marked by the necessity of death. Beyond sources of invaluable truths about the human person, one can thus also approach the early accounts of humanity in Genesis as early explanations of the loss of paradise, of the realities of suffering, and of unsatiated longing.¹⁹⁷ In this sense, these chapters of Genesis can be seen to represent a protest against,¹⁹⁸ rather than an acceptance of, the human condition that one is familiar with today.¹⁹⁹

"Man set himself against God and sought to find fulfillment apart from God."²⁰⁰ *MD* quotes this segment of *Gaudium et Spes* as the first line of its opening paragraph on Eve and original sin. In this chapter, Saint John Paul II spends a noteworthy amount

¹⁹¹ Ps 131:2-3; Is 42:14; 46:3; 49:14-15; 66:13.

¹⁹² Stein, *Woman*, 44-45.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁹⁴ *MD*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ See Gn 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, 65.

¹⁹⁹ Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 46, and *GS*, 13. This break in unity as the fundamental consequence of the Fall thus reiterates the communal nature of the *imago Dei* in humanity as prime.

²⁰⁰ *GS*, 13, as cited in *MD*, 9.

of time addressing the reality of the Fall and the consequences it had/has. Even though this Apostolic Letter is on the dignity and vocation of woman, he deems this necessary because he sees original sin as directly impacting the *imago Dei* in the human person. One reads, “It is not possible to read ‘the mystery of sin’ without making reference to the whole truth about the ‘image and likeness’ to God, which is the basis of biblical anthropology.”²⁰¹

Original sin cannot be understood as it ought to be if disconnected from the mystery of the creation of humanity in God’s image and likeness.²⁰² In relating the two together, one is able to see that original sin, in its basic sense, is a non-likeness to God. In an instance of profound blindness, humanity somehow saw it logical to attain the purpose and fulfillment of their lives, which can only be found in God, apart from God. In turning away from God humanity hence also turned away from the image and likeness in which and for which it was created.

Furthermore, in her efforts to explain the nature of the humanity’s search for ‘equality,’ Margaret McCarthy writes that, “*Genesis* describes the original sin as the acceptance of a distorted image of God and the decision, on the basis of *that* image, to be ‘like God’ in the wrong way.”²⁰³ As a means of clarifying this statement (which subsequently also serves to clarify the current discussion on original sin being made in this thesis) Margaret McCarthy then goes on to quote Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger:

[T]he sin of Adam was not really his wanting to be like God; this, after all, is the call the Creator himself has given to human beings. Adam’s failure was to have chosen the wrong way of seeking likeness to God and to have excogitated for himself a very shabby idea of God. Adam imagined that he would be like God if he could subsist solely by his own power and could be self-sufficient in giving life to himself as he saw fit.²⁰⁴

In this sense, “the self-sufficiency Adam chose...was precisely to be like God *without God*, circumventing a *filial* relation to the Father.”²⁰⁵ The reason that this aspect of original sin is being raised in this discussion of the Christian concept of motherhood

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 139.

²⁰⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching* 25 (Matthew J. O’Connell trans., Franciscan Herald Press 1985) (1973), as cited in Ibid, 139-40.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 140.

is that, when one perceives original sin in this light, one can also begin to see that the sin of humanity from the beginning was a rupture in the relationship between, not just creation and Creator, but also between child and Father. It is of no surprise then that the effects of this sin are so readily seen in the family – in humanity’s misconceptions of fatherhood, motherhood, and new life.²⁰⁶

In addition to the ultimate consequence of sin - the separation of humanity from his Creator - “man has disrupted also his proper relationship to his own ultimate goal as well as his whole relationship toward himself and others and all created things.”²⁰⁷ Accordingly, all that bears this non-likeness to God throughout history and in the world today, such as the degradation of the dignity of woman and the value of her vocation to motherhood, is a direct result of original sin. However, far from abandoning hope, Saint John Paul II notes that the *imago Dei* in humanity cannot be said to have been destroyed. Instead, Saint John Paul II speaks of the *imago Dei* after the Fall as, “obscured” and “diminished.”²⁰⁸ As the human person is only complete in God, as they are only able to come to a full realisation of self in God, choosing against God, the image of God in humanity was “diminished.”²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, in spite of this epic Fall from communion with God, in which and for which humanity was created, in His divine mercy, God did not allow sin to result in complete “non-likeness.” This can be readily seen by the fact that the original blessings of Genesis 1:18 are not removed by the sin of humanity but are only diminished - stained and stifled with suffering. It is for this reason that Saint John Chrysostom (349-407) writes,²¹⁰ “See the Lord’s goodness, how much mildness he employs despite such a terrible fall.”²¹¹

²⁰⁶ See, Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Vittorio Messori ed., Jenny McPhee & Martha McPhee trans, 1994) 227-28, as cited in *ibid*, 140-41.

²⁰⁷ *GS*, 13.

²⁰⁸ *MD*, 9. *Gaudium et Spes* uses the term “darkened” (*GS*, 13). See also Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human,” 26.

²⁰⁹ Sibley W. Towner makes a point of asserting that this “diminishment” was/is not an ontological change in the human person. To uphold such a permanent change in nature would be the equivalent of saying that, after the Fall a different kind/species of humanity existed. (Towner, “Clones of God. Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” 351-52.) Thus, in reading Saint John Paul II, “obscured” and “diminished” should not be taken to mean “altered.” Instead, his clever use of adjectives imply that the image is still there but that its being fully manifest as it ought to be has been somehow inhibited.

²¹⁰ Saint John Chrysostom, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 30.

²¹¹ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 17.30, as cited in, Oden, *Ancient Christian*, 92.

Consequences for Woman

Original sin is the sin of humanity - male and female.²¹² Consequently, its effects reach to both man and woman.²¹³ This reality again affirms that man and woman have distinct and separate masculine and feminine vocations. For the female, she suffers two explicit consequences of this rupture of communion: pain in childbearing, and her husband ruling over her.²¹⁴ Now, instead of ruling together, there will be a constant struggle of one trying to rule over the other. Instead of joyful and fruitful multiplication, woman will suffer grievously to bring forth new life. The pain of labour is evident by its inclusions in biblical descriptions for pain. In fact, it seems to have been the ultimate description of pain.²¹⁵ The pain assigned to the birthing of children is marked by the necessity of death – the consequence of original sin.²¹⁶

Furthermore, the imperative of fecundity is conclusive of a reiteration that humanity bears the *imago Dei*.²¹⁷ Humanity is still in the image and likeness of God and can still produce new life like its Creator. However, the image is now diminished and the labours are made wearisome. Nonetheless, even with this postlapsarian frustration, God's command to them to be fruitful and multiply, connected to the *imago Dei*, is still characterised as a blessing.²¹⁸ This can be readily seen in the Genesis 7 accounts of the great flood. This re-creation bears similarities to the initial creation accounts that prelude the Bible. A striking difference, nonetheless, is the general omission of blessings.²¹⁹ Humanity is not explicitly commanded to subdue the earth and have dominion over all living creatures as he was in Gen 1:28. This contrast is mentioned, not to address any underlying meaning, but simply to highlight that, whilst this

²¹² Gn 2-3.

²¹³ Zamfir, "The Quest for the "Eternal Feminine": An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman," 505.

²¹⁴ Gn 3:16. These consequences are directly related to the blessings pronounced after humanity's creation in Genesis 1:28.

²¹⁵ Ps 48:6; Is 21:3; Hos 13:13-14; Mic 4:9-10; Jer 4:31; 22:23; 50:43; 1 Thes 5:3; Rev 12:2-5; etc.

²¹⁶ Gn 3:16; Rom 6:23. Cf. Gn 2:17; Prov 11:19; Eze 18:4; Rom 1:32; Rom 6:16. See also, Rom 5:12.

²¹⁷ Gn 8:6-7. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 10-12.

²¹⁸ This is not the last instance upon which the blessing of fruitfulness and multiplication is conferred either. David S. Shapiro notes that this blessing extended to: Abraham and Sarah (Gn 17:15), as well as to Ishmael (Gn 17:20); through Isaac, Abraham was to be blessed with seed as numerous as the stars on high and as the sand by the seashore (Gn 22:16), a blessing repeated to Jacob (Gn 28:13; 32:13); and even given on a national level (Gn 12:2; 46:3; Ex 1:7; cf. Deut 26:5). He further notes that, just as God bestows the blessing of fruitfulness and multiplication on humanity, "The blessings that Biblical personalities confer on their children or grandchildren is chiefly that of fertility."

Shapiro, "Be Fruitful and Multiply," 45. (Cf. Gn 24:60; 28:3; 48:16).

²¹⁹ Shapiro, "Be Fruitful and Multiply," 44.

blessing is omitted in this account of creation, the blessing to be fruitful and multiply is not.²²⁰

The blessing for fruitfulness and multiplication remains, but there is no reassertion of the blessing of dominion. In line with what has so far been discussed, perhaps this is due to the disharmony and inequality now present between man and woman. Man is affronted with the desire to lord himself over woman. The difference between man and woman is still existent, but if anything, it is now so over-exemplified to the extent that it diminishes their original equality. There is now a great disruption of the original relationship of unity between man and woman that directly correlates to their dignity as individual persons, as well as their capacity to bear the *imago Dei* as a collaboration - as humanity.²²¹

As aforementioned, the human person can only find their fulfilment in a sincere gift of self, but now their capacity to relate freely and fully, by giving and by receiving, is diminished. Consequently, their facility to find themselves, to realise their humanity, is also diminished. In this sense, one can see that the consequence described to woman in Genesis 3:16 whilst, first and foremost, of immense detriment to her, also effects man. It can be seen to also diminish the dignity of man as he, who is created to find self-fulfilment through the sincere gift of himself to woman, is constantly confronted with the temptation and the tendency to rule over her.²²²

This section has thus served to highlight four primary consequences of the Fall that impact directly on conceptions of motherhood. The first two, relating to humanity as a whole, are the consequences of disunity and the diminishment and obscuration of the *imago Dei*. The second two, specifically related to woman, are the consequences of the subordination of woman and her strife in mothering. The effects of these four particular consequences are long and numerous. Turning particularly to the first woman now, however, one can see the immediate effects of these consequences on Eve as a wife and mother. Furthermore, one can see what effects treatments of Eve as the first type of woman, and secondary interpretations of said treatments, have had on both early and modern conceptions of woman and motherhood.

²²⁰ Gn 8:7.

²²¹ *MD*, 10.

²²² Cf. Eph 5:28.

1.3.3. Negative Connotations: Femininity as a Representation of Evil

A fruit of the inequality between man and woman borne of the Fall is readily seen in the disproportionate blame placed on Eve as the cause of original sin. As “initiator,” the majority of the guilt for the great tragedy of the Fall is attributed to Eve.²²³ The consequence of this imbalanced attribution of blame is that Eve was characterised by her moral weakness over and above any other quality. The culpable action of Eve, as the first type of woman, thus also became the action of all women. This section will hence look at conceptions of Eve and the effect these conceptions have consequently had on conceptions of femaleness.

A negative emphasis has been placed on Eve due to her seemingly primary role in the Fall, but more so because of the negative ways she is contrasted to Mary in discourse regarding redemption. Tina Beattie is adamant that consigning Eve’s sinfulness to femaleness is one of the grave injustices of Catholic theology.²²⁴ In the following chapter on Mary, there will be a section that will deal more thoroughly with this notion of contrast and comparison between Eve and Mary. For now, it will suffice to say that even with the title “the mother of all living,” Eve is often most strongly associated with the consequences of the Fall. In this sense, one could say that she is essentially known more as “the mother of all that is wrong with the living,” or, in more stark terms, “the mother of sin.”²²⁵

Tina Beattie offers that such an understanding came to be dominant through the majority of patristic writings being laced with heavily androcentric undertones. By their explicit and implicit insinuations that the female body represents carnal weakness and non-godliness for both men and for women, these writings led its readers to conclude that manliness is equated with holiness.²²⁶ Due to this, the attainment of holiness for both sexes has, to some degree, been pursued through the peonage of the

²²³ Sir 25:24; Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis*, 2.30.1.

²²⁴ See also the agreement of, Julie Faith Parker, “Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of עמה in Genesis 3:6b,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 132, no. 4 (2013): 732. For an offer of an exegetical defence of Eve’s “innocence,” see, Parker, “Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of עמה in Genesis 3:6b.”

²²⁵ *ibid*, 731. See also Korsak, “Eve, Malignant or Maligned,” 453. On the complete other end of the scale, Judith E. McKinlay not only seeks to exonerate Eve, but actually makes out to prove her sinful actions as ultimately good. See, McKinlay, “Eve and the Bad Girls Club,” 32.

²²⁶ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 50, 56, 73-74.

flesh with its feminine associations. The holy woman, the redeemed woman, was thus a manly woman, one that bore the least resemblance to femininity. Tina Beattie claims that this was because, in the pre-modern Church, gender was primarily understood symbolically rather than biologically.²²⁷

It is interesting to consider this view that Tina Beattie presents of the obtainment of Christian holiness lying in the appropriation of masculine qualities. At its core, this misguided philosophy seems to mirror secular perspectives regarding the ideal woman today. The quintessential woman which all women are urged to at least imitate, if not become, is the woman who successfully makes her mark on the world through the acquisition of positions of power, prestige, and prominence.²²⁸ This is not to say that women cannot or should not obtain such (something that will be discussed later on). This is to say, however, that rather than embracing and fully employing the gift of their femininity in order to obtain such, it is as if they must attempt to do away with those feminine qualities that keep them “inferior,” and strive to be able to do all that men do and do it better. Herein lies a detriment of some professionalism today.²²⁹

In speaking on the dignity and vocation of woman, *MD* notes that Genesis 3:16 firstly refers to the marital relationship, but then proffers that it also extends to every sphere of woman’s social life.²³⁰ It is for this reason that history is marked by discrimination against woman. Saint John Paul II states that, within the general context of human rights, the issue of “women’s rights” has taken on a new importance.²³¹ He then goes on to explain that the great truths about humanity revealed in the Genesis creation accounts can shed great and invaluable light on the contemporary questions about woman. Doing such would be to affirm the dignity and vocation that result from the authentic diversity and personal uniqueness of both man and woman.²³²

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 56. Perhaps here one can also see a need for returning to the creation of man and woman in the *imago Dei* and questioning whether or not it can be said that the *imago Dei* is also somehow apparent or actualised in the physical.

²²⁸ *MD*, 20.

²²⁹ How exactly this is a detriment will be discussed later on in this thesis when looking at the unique genius of femininity and its role in enhancing all spheres of human activity.

²³⁰ *MD*, 10.

²³¹ *Ibid*.

²³² *Ibid*.

The tendency to masculinise women or for woman to strive for masculinity, is a direct result of the Genesis 3:16 consequence of male domination.²³³ Saint John Paul II vehemently speaks against this, urging that, in their efforts to liberate themselves from male domination, women “must not under any condition...appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’.”²³⁴ Any occurrence of such is a submission and not a liberation, from male dominance, a perpetuation and not a cessation of the consequence of sin that leads to inequality among the sexes. What is more, if woman does pursue this course as the solution to her oppression and the source of her worth, she forsakes the feminine. The first thing affected, disregarded, and devalued, is that which is most obviously feminine, that which is most obviously not masculine - motherhood.²³⁵

It is for these reasons that Saint John Paul II speaks of an ever-real and well-founded fear of woman continuing to pursue, whether consciously or subconsciously, masculine qualities. For, in doing so, they are consequently deforming and diminishing the essential and “enormous richness” of their femininity.²³⁶ Woman would thus be unable to reach self-fulfillment. Consequently, man’s capacity for self-discovery would also be diminished “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.”²³⁷

It is thus apparent that, in relation to the two distinct consequences of the Fall for woman – pain in childbirth and subordination – the image of woman has come to be tainted. In some instances, the image of woman has been painted to be something quite different to what God created it to be. Overall, this seems to have led to two primary consequences: originally, the projection of a false image of femininity onto woman, and more contemporarily, the desire of women to liberate themselves from their notions of femininity.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid. See also, Ernest Caparros, “A Disordered View of Manhood and Its Effect on the Idea of Womanhood,” *Ave Maria Law Review*. 8, no. 293 (2009-2010): 296; and, Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 71-82, and, 194-204.

²³⁵ *MD*, 8.

²³⁶ *MD*, 10.

²³⁷ Ibid.

A Thrill of Hope

In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures: "It was not you", said Joseph to his brothers, "who sent me here, but God. . . You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive." From the greatest moral evil ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God, by his grace that "abounded all the more", brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good.²³⁸

When God is accounting the consequences of the Fall in Genesis 3, the serpent and the ground are both explicitly deemed as cursed, but the human person is not. Despite having just laid out the immediate consequences of original sin on the dignity and vocation of woman, Genesis 3 does not only contain the negative consequences that humanity now faces as a result of their choosing non-likeness over likeness to God. As it foretells the triumph over sin, Genesis 3 also lets all know that hope is not lost: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."²³⁹ *MD* notes that it is important that this foretelling of the Redeemer relates to "the woman."²⁴⁰ As the progenitrix of Him who will be the Redeemer of humanity, the woman is designated the prime place in the *Protoevangelium*. Adjoined to her title, "Mother of all living," the *Protoevangelium* reveals that God's mercy finds and will find its expression in the gift of life. This gift, as one can see in Eve, is uniquely and specifically entrusted to woman.²⁴¹ It is from this point that the two significant female figures of salvation history - Eve and Mary - are joined under the name of "woman."²⁴²

The inheritance of original sin as seen in Genesis 3:16 is reckoned conquerable and quality among the sexes made attainable. Such becomes possible through the redemptive work of Christ. Yet it is something that humanity must strive towards, "the task of every human being."²⁴³ "God willed creation as a gift addressed to man, an

²³⁸ CCC 312.

²³⁹ Gn 3:15.

²⁴⁰ *MD*, 11.

²⁴¹ Caparros, "A Disordered View of Manhood and Its Effect on the Idea of Womanhood," 298-99.

²⁴² *MD*, 11, *GS*, 13. For more, see, Peters. Zamfir, "The Quest for the 'Eternal Feminine': An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman," 505.

²⁴³ *MD*, 10.

inheritance destined for and entrusted to him.”²⁴⁴ Why exactly such is possible and how it may be achieved, is what the following chapters will endeavour to uncover.

The Genesis accounts of the primordial woman are altogether brief. Nonetheless, from what little is revealed, one is left with an understanding that womanhood and motherhood are inextricably linked. The accounts of Eve also reveal that motherhood is characterised by something of a redemptive nature. This is evident in the fact that as the “help” of man, she is known by him as “mother of all living.” Yet, this aspect of motherhood is most clear in the connection between the woman of the *Protoevangelium* and the ultimate salvation that her fruitfulness will engender. In this light, although Adam named Eve “mother of all the living” only after the Fall, one cannot infer that motherhood is a result of the Fall.²⁴⁵

1.4. Conclusion

In reading the creation accounts, one gains a great sense of God’s careful purpose and intention behind all His creative actions.

Through the creation accounts and the revelation of God as Triune, one can begin to see that sex is not an attribute but is constitutive of the human person. Genesis 1:27 stresses the creation of humanity as simultaneously male and female.²⁴⁶ Sexual difference is a reality from the beginning, revealed as part of the absolute value and dignity of a person.²⁴⁷ He created humanity as a them – male and female.

The body and biological sex are part of the absolute value and dignity of the person, and it is on these concepts that the models of gender should be based.²⁴⁸ The wealth of personal resources of femininity is undoubtedly different than the wealth of personal resources that men possess.²⁴⁹ But, as earlier established, difference does not equate to inferiority. It is on the basis of these different resources that men and women are

²⁴⁴ CCC 299.

²⁴⁵ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 90.

²⁴⁶ Gn 1:27. Cf. Gn 5:1; 9:6; Mk 10:6.

²⁴⁷ “This concept first describes the unicity of each person. Each has something of the absolute which makes him/her an end and not a means, and for this reason each one must always be loved for him/herself” (McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 150).

²⁴⁸ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 86.

²⁴⁹ For woman, Saint John Paul II refers to this wealth of resources as the “feminine genius” (*MD*, 31).

able to understand their dignity and vocation and, hence, their fulfillment as persons. Such resources were received on the day that God created humanity as male and female in His own image and likeness. On this day woman also inherited a unique expression of the *imago Dei* that is specifically feminine, just as man received one that was specifically masculine. Consequently, the dissolution of femininity or the desire to strip away femininity in the pursuit of independence and progress, is not progress at all. It is instead a digress away from what humanity essentially is.²⁵⁰ Authentic equality between male and female is thus crucial.

The uncovering of the unique disclosure of the *imago Dei* in woman will be the aim of the following chapters. The brief look at the figure of Eve just undertaken will be furthered in the next chapter by looking at her in light of and in conjunction with the New Eve. In turning to the second Scriptural type of woman - Mary, the Mother of God Himself - insight will be gained into the nature and dignity of motherhood, as well as its place in salvation history. This will enable a fuller understanding of the Christian concept of motherhood and will place this thesis in a position to then apply this concept into the contemporary context.

²⁵⁰ See, 1 Cor 12:12-26. Cf. Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:17.

2. “And Blessed is the Fruit of Your Womb”: Motherhood in the New Testament

2.1 Introduction

Thus, by considering the reality “Woman - Mother of God”, we enter in a very appropriate way into this Marian Year meditation. This reality also determines the essential horizon of reflection on the dignity and the vocation of women. In anything we think, say or do concerning the dignity and the vocation of women, our thoughts, hearts and actions must not become detached from this horizon. The dignity of every human being and the vocation corresponding to that dignity find their definitive measure in union with God. Mary, the woman of the Bible, is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation. For no human being, male or female, created in the image and likeness of God, can in any way attain fulfillment apart from this image and likeness.¹

Although written as a reflection for the occasion of the Marian year,² *MD* was not written with the purpose of presenting a reflection on the person of Mary. As this chapter will reveal, it was written in order to gain an understanding of who woman is and what her vocation entails. It just so happens, that in order to understand this, one must turn to Mary – the exemplar of womanhood.³

This chapter will thus look at the fundamental role Mary assumes in the restoration of the *imago Dei* in humanity, and especially in its restoration in woman. In order to do so, the chapter will be divided into three main sections. The first, titled “The Blessed Motherhood of Mary,” will look at the cooperation of Mary in the Incarnation of Christ who reveals both God to humanity, and humanity to itself. The central section, titled “Mary as the New Eve,” will identify Mary and Eve as the “woman” of the *Protoevangelium*, asking what this entails and analysing some of the fundamental similarities and contrasts between these two key figures of womanhood. The final section, titled “The Fruit of Her Womb, Jesus, and the Light He Sheds on Motherhood,” will then disclose what the Sonship of Christ reveals about motherhood, as well as look at Christ’s own interactions with women in the Gospels and the light these interactions shed on the dignity and vocation of woman.

¹ *MD*, 5.

² Robert L. Fastiggi, “Mary: Exemplar of Faithful Love for Virgins, Spouses, Mothers, and the Church,” *Ave Maria Law Review* 8, no. 2 (2010): 339.

³ *MD*, 5. Thus, it is by no means happenstance that *Mulieris Dignitatem*, an Apostolic Letter on the dignity and vocation of woman, was issued on the Solemnity of Mary’s Assumption, in celebration of the Marian Year.

In doing so, this chapter thus hopes to uncover what the motherhood of Mary, the motherhood of Eve, and the Sonship of Christ reveal about the Christian concept of motherhood so that this thesis can then move to apply this concept to the contemporary context.

2.2. *Mary and The Blessed Motherhood of Mary*

The first chapter of *MD* is titled: Woman – Mother of God (*Theotókos*). To begin this chapter on Mary as the Mother of God, Saint John Paul II sets out to reflect on Galatians 4:4: “When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman.”⁴ In doing so, Saint John Paul II turns the reader’s attention to, yes, Mary as mother, but more so to Mary as the one who reveals the image and likeness of God fully unobscured and completely undiminished. Apart from Christ Himself, Mary as His mother is significant for she, in her collaborating with the redemptive work of her Son, reveals to humanity the *imago Dei*. One is able to look to her and realise humanity as God intended. In a particularly unique way, she will furthermore show woman both what it is to be woman and mother, as well as what these gifts entail.⁵ This following section will thus look at the ways in which this is so.

The Incarnation as the Revelation of God and Man

Humanity is constantly searching for the truths that lie central to its fulfillment and self-discovery. Men and women together strive towards obtaining answers to the questions that rise out of the core of every human being, such as: “What is a human being?”, “What is the human person made for?”, and so forth.⁶ In answer to the longing of every human person, and to these questions regarding to their purpose and fulfillment, “When the time had fully come, God sent forth His son, born of woman.”⁷ The fullness of time commences at the Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel appeared to disclose the intention of God to Mary.⁸

⁴ Ibid, 3. For an exegetical look at this verse, see, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., “The Letter to the Galatians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, eds. S.S. Raymond E. Brown, et al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1990), 787.

⁵ To start this chapter of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Saint John Paul II begins by speaking of humanity’s long and frustrated search for itself throughout history. He thus quotes the Second Vatican Council which lists the fundamental questions that lie at the heart of every human person. (*MD*, 3.)

⁶ Acts 17:27-28.

⁷ Gal 4:4. Cf. Jn 1:14. *MD*, 4.

⁸ Lk 1:26-27, 31-33. See also CCC 488.

God's sending of His Son is a two-fold revelation. Primarily it is the self-revelation of God.⁹ Secondly, it is the ultimate self-revelation and self-realisation to humanity. In relation to this dual revelation of Incarnate Word (God to humanity and humanity to itself), Thomas G. Weinandy notes that Saint Irenaeus speaks of the Incarnation as the fulfillment of the *imago Dei*.¹⁰ Thomas G. Weinandy sums this up concisely when he states: "Only by becoming man could the Son of God perfectly image his own image – manhood – and so perfectly exemplify how one is to live in his image and likeness."¹¹ Indeed, Saint Irenaeus asserted that the Incarnation is directly related to the restoration of the *imago Dei* in humanity.¹² Thus, one is able to see how it can rightly be said that, in sending Christ, God sends the ultimate self-revelation, and self-realisation, to humanity.¹³

The sending of the Son as a Son of Man "born of woman,"¹⁴ thus "constitutes the culminating and *definitive point of God's self-revelation to humanity*."¹⁵ The self-revelation of God in the event of the Incarnation has a fundamentally redemptive character. In relation to the salvific character of this divine self-revelation, *MD* cites Ephesians 1:9-10. This passage highlights the underlying intention of the Incarnation as that of reunification. The unity Saint Paul refers to is the unity that was present in the creation narratives, the unity which was originally present in humanity when it was an undiminished and unobscured likeness and image of its Creator.¹⁶ This unity is restored and ennobled through that same Trinitarian communion through which it was first established.¹⁷ The Father reveals Christ to humanity and in turn, by virtue of their

⁹ Jn 1:1,18. Cf. Eze 37:27; Jn 14:6, 9; Rom 1:3, 4; Phil 2:6-8; etc. What greater divine revelation could there be than the imminence of Emmanuel, of God Himself becoming flesh and walking among His creation? (Mt 1:23; Is 7:14; Jn 1:14.)

¹⁰ Saint Irenaeus, *A.H.*, 5, 16, 2, as cited, Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human", 25. See also, Allen, "*Mulieris Dignitatem* Twenty Years Later: An Overview of the Document and Challenges," 15-16.

¹¹ Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human," 25, see also 30

¹² Saint Irenaeus, *A.H.*, 5, Preface, as cited in, *ibid*, 28, 30.

¹³ Hence also Gavin Ortlund's insistence on the significance of his observation that the very first genealogy of the Bible (Gn 5:1-3) begins with God, and the very last genealogy of the Bible (Lk 3:38) ends with God (Ortlund, "Image of Adam, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue," 673).

¹⁴ Cf. Jn 3:17; 5:23; 1 Jn 4:14.

¹⁵ *MD*, 3. "Son of Man" is one of the most used references for Christ in the Gospels. Christ Himself refers to Himself as "Son of Man" over and above every other title. In the Gospel According to Matthew alone, one finds numerous uses of this title: i.e. Mt 8:20; 11:19; 12:8; 13:37; 17:9; 19:28; 24:27, 44.

¹⁶ See earlier chapter, 2.2.1, 17.

¹⁷ Cf. Eph 2:18.

being one, Christ likewise reveals the Father.¹⁸ Even in the Annunciation, before Christ was even born into this world, Saint John Paul II notes that the Trinity is revealed.¹⁹ It is for this reason that the Catechism of the Catholic Church refers to Mary as “the burning bush of definitive theophany.”²⁰ Through her, God is revealed, God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and thus God as communion.

The secondary aspect of this two-fold revelation is the ultimate self-revelation of humanity to itself.²¹ God sends His Son that He might be known, and that humanity might know itself. For this reason, Saint John Paul II states that it is easy to think of the Self-revelation of God in the context of humanity’s age-long asking of life’s fundamental questions. In and through Christ, the human person finds who they are, why they are, how they are, and so forth. That Christ’s coming is indeed the answer to all humanity’s searching, is anticipated at the Nazareth Annunciation. It is for this reason that Saint John Paul II is able to state that in the Annunciation the human person finds the beginning of that definitive answer to their personhood.²²

In this sense, the Annunciation was an announcement of the greatest event in the history of humanity. What the Angel Gabriel was announcing was the coming of the long awaited Messiah, Him who the hearts of Israel, and indeed of every human person, had been desperately yearning for as their fulfilment and restoration.²³ What he announced was the ultimate Self-revelation of God who had so long been present to Israel, but in some sense hidden behind the veil of separation caused by sin.²⁴ What he announced to Mary was that God Himself was coming to earth, was meeting humanity face to face humanity in humanity’s own image and likeness.²⁵

¹⁸ Cf. Mt 11:27-28; Jn 14:6; Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; Heb 10:20.

¹⁹ Lk 1:31-37.

²⁰ CCC 723. Cf. Ex 3.

²¹ Sister Mary Prudence Allen puts particular focus on Saint John Paul II’s speaking of Mary’s *fiat* as an exercise of her free will, her fully “personal and feminine ‘I’” (*MD*, 4). Viewing this point in light of Saint John Paul II’s theological anthropology of the *imago Dei* being manifest in humanity’s intellect and free will, Allen summates that, “Mary’s intellect and will are those very gifts she inherited by being created in the image of God” (Allen, “*Mulieris Dignitatem* Twenty Years Later: An Overview of the Document and Challenges,” 17). Thus, Mary’s *fiat* is an assent to the full revelation and elevation of the *imago Dei*, and yet an assent that was only possible by virtue of her being made in the *imago Dei*.

²² *MD*, 5.

²³ See for example: Gn 3:15; Num 24:17; Deut 18:18-19; Mic 5:2; Is 40:3; Zec 9:9; etc.

²⁴ 2 Cor 3:13. Cf. Gn 18:17-33; Ex 3; 26:1-14; 34:33-35.

²⁵ Heb 2:17. Cf. Heb 2:14.

The fullness of time that Saint Paul was speaking about, and that Saint John Paul II highlights, is therefore a time when the dignity of the human person is made manifest.²⁶ This dignity is rooted in the Redemptive work of Christ who will, not only save humanity from its sin, but raise it up to communion with God.²⁷ Saint John Paul II offers that, with this understanding the “woman” referred to by Saint Paul is thus the representative and archetype of every human being, male and female alike.²⁸ To this “woman,” one is thus able to turn in order to find an authentic answer to those ontological and anthropological questions at the heart of every human person.

But, being differentiated by sex, to some extent men and women also must seek the answers to anthropological questions particular to their masculinity/femininity.²⁹ Thus, for example, woman not only asks: “What is a human being?” and “What is the human person made for?”, but also, “What is femaleness?”, “What is the vocation of woman?”, and so forth. The answers to these questions were long hidden under the obscurity of sin and, where sin abides, are still obscured to different degrees today. Nonetheless, in Christ and Mary one finds these images both unobscured and undiminished. It is to them, then, that the humanity must turn in order to learn of their own personhood. To disclose this perfect image of woman, this thesis thus now turns to Mary as the second and ultimate type of woman. Doing so will also enable this thesis to uncover the unobscured and undiminished image of motherhood.

²⁶ Rom 8:19-24.

²⁷ Cf. Jn 17:21.

²⁸ *MD*, 5.

²⁹ Refer to previous chapter, 2.2.2, 24.

Mary as Theotokos

The particular union of the “Theotókos” with God - which fulfils in the most eminent manner the supernatural predestination to union with the Father which is granted to every human being (filii in Filio) - is a pure grace and, as such, a gift of the Spirit. At the same time, however, through her response of faith Mary exercises her free will and thus fully shares with her personal and feminine “I” in the event of the Incarnation. With her “fiat”, Mary becomes the authentic subject of that union with God which was realized in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, who is of one substance with the Father. All of God's action in human history at all times respects the free will of the human “I”. And such was the case with the Annunciation at Nazareth.³⁰

In an extraordinary way, the fullness of time specifically makes manifest the great dignity of woman.³¹ At the centre of this salvific event is the “woman.” The conception and birth of Christ by the “woman,” identifies a form of union with God which uniquely belongs to the “woman.”³² This union is what is commonly referred to as motherhood.

The means of this divinely selected relationship between Christ and Mary, Creator and Creation, as Son and mother is of particular import. Almighty and omnipotent, if desired, God could have revealed Himself by any means available.³³ Nonetheless, of all the ways in which the Incarnation could have been accomplished, He saw it most fitting to be born of a virgin. Furthermore, in His coming to reveal humanity to itself, His first act of such revelation is the revelation of woman to herself as mother.³⁴ But, before looking deeper into the meaning of this union of motherhood between God and woman as revealed through Mary, it first must be noted that Mary is (in the fullest sense understandable) indeed the Mother of God.

It was in 431 AD, at the Council of Ephesus that the long-held belief that Mary is indeed the Mother of God was solemnly defined.³⁵ Much, if not all, of Marian doctrine

³⁰ *MD*, 4.

³¹ *Ibid*, 5.

³² *Ibid*, 4.

³³ Mary’s own cry of faith at the Annunciation was: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Lk 1:37). Cf. 1 Chr 29:12; Is 43:13; Eze 1:24; Mk 14:36; Rev 1:8; etc.

³⁴ This notion that motherhood is one of the fundamental sources of self-discovery for woman is affirmed by Saint John Paul II in his brief exposition of parenthood in *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willets (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 258-62) and will be looked at more comprehensively in the following chapter of this thesis.

³⁵ For further historical and theological conclusions on this Council and its repercussions, see, Aidan Nichols, “The Divine Motherhood”, in *There Is No Rose* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2015), 27.

has come to be defined and declared in defense of Christological doctrine.³⁶ On a basic level, there were some elements of truth in the conceptions of heretics such as Nestorius (c. 386 - 450), Marcion (c. 85 - c. 160) and Valentinus (c. 100 - c. 175).³⁷ Yet, in reference to the latter heresy, as has already been expounded, the human person did not need to escape corruption and ignorance, but needed to be redeemed from it. This corruption and ignorance was not something inherent in the body, as the Gnostics believed, but the obscurity and diminishment of the *imago Dei* in the human person as the result of sin.³⁸

The Church Fathers, other theologians, and for the Councils, in order to answer such heresies, generally saw it best to place a primary emphasis on the anthropological. Thus, the earliest Marian theologies placed their focus on Mary's human motherhood as evidence of Christ's humanity.³⁹ Just as the human person cannot be divided into the corporeal and the incorporeal, so too Christ is both mysteriously and at once, fully God and fully human. Accordingly, the name "*Theotókos*" – God-bearer – was thus given as the name proper to the union with God granted to the Virgin Mary.⁴⁰

The physical maternity of Mary affirms the humanity of Christ. Furthermore, her motherhood not only reveals Christ's humanity, but also something of the nature of His divinity. In the emphasis that has been traditionally placed on this mystery of the Incarnation, Christianity achieves a double inversion of the pagan relationship between divinity and motherhood.⁴¹ Christ is born fully human and fully divine by a human mother, but without a sexual act with the divine, a characteristic feature of mythological sagas. "The Incarnation is therefore more supernatural and more natural than the human epiphanies of the pagan gods."⁴² In the case of the motherhood of Mary, those pagan notions which see women dominated by the gods or used as pawns in a game of the gods, is confronted with the subtle but powerful figure of Mary who

³⁶ Mary Barker, "Mary's Motherhood Matters Most," *Compass* (2013): 33.

³⁷ Nestorius (consecrated as bishop of Constantinople on the 10th of April 428). *MD*, 4.

³⁸ As explained in the previous chapter, 2.3.1, 43.

³⁹ *MD*, 4. Cf. Lk 1:35. Cf. Mt 8:29; Mk15:39; Jn 3:18; 10:36; Jn 20:31; Acts 9:20; Rom 1:4; Gal 2:20; Heb 4:14.

⁴⁰ As aforementioned, this title was officially attributed to Mary at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.). See also *MD*, 4.

⁴¹ Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 88.

⁴² *Ibid.*

assents to her motherhood freely, selflessly, whole-heartedly, in Love, and for Love.⁴³ She is able to do so through her being full of grace.

Hail, Full of Grace

*The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.*⁴⁴

As aforementioned, Saint John Paul II asserts that it is at the Annunciation that the human person begins to find the answer to the questions of their existence. Mary as the protagonist of the Annunciation, is indeed the first evidence of her Son's redemptive mission, a mission enabled and prepared for by grace.⁴⁵ By the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit alone was the young Virgin of Nazareth able to accept and assent to what is "impossible with men, but not with God."⁴⁶ It was hence most apt that the mother of Christ, in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,"⁴⁷ the Word who Himself was "full of grace," should herself be "full of grace."⁴⁸

Because Mary is "full of grace,"⁴⁹ and assents selflessly to the will of the Lord, becoming one with God in both spirit and flesh, she becomes the ultimate exemplar of human nature fully free but utterly and perfectly transformed by grace. In her one sees the truth of Saint Edith Stein's statement that, "Grace perfects nature – it does not destroy it."⁵⁰ Being full of grace, as Robert L. Fastiggi notes, Mary is the truest example of this principle.⁵¹ It is thus to her that this thesis looks in order to see motherhood in its perfection, a perfection brought about by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

⁴³ Joseph Pieper, "Love," in *Faith. Hope. Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 273; Danese and Di Nicola, "Woman and Man: Created One for the Other," 105.

⁴⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution (hereafter *LG*), 56. Cf. *LG*, 61.

⁴⁵ Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, (1854): DS 2803, as cited in, CCC 722.

⁴⁶ Cf. Mk 10: 27.

⁴⁷ Col 2:9.

⁴⁸ Jn 1:14. CCC 721. See also *MD*, 4-5.

⁴⁹ Lk 1:28, 30.

⁵⁰ Stein, *Woman*, 50. See also, *MD*, 5.

⁵¹ Fastiggi, "Mary: Exemplar of Faithful Love for Virgins, Spouses, Mothers, and the Church," 342.

It was essential that Mary be born wholly in grace, that in faith she may be able to freely assent to Gabriel's announcement of her vocation.⁵² This favour of grace,⁵³ the restoration of the image and likeness of God in her, comes wholly from Him whom she conceived in her womb – the Son of God.⁵⁴ Thus, as the image and likeness of God in Mary is unobscured and undiminished by the non-likeness that results from sin, one thus sees manifest in her the finality of humanity's being fulfilled and ennobled in supernatural apotheosis to complete union with God through and in Christ.⁵⁵ It is with this understanding that Saint Irenaeus could write: "Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race."⁵⁶

It is thus of no surprise that Mary is looked to as the exemplar of the human restored to their original image and likeness through a human response to redemption.⁵⁷ As a disciple, a mother, and a virgin, she is also looked to as the exemplar for humanity in all its various states of life.⁵⁸ Mary is reckoned such because the specific relationship that she as *Theotókos* has with God, is founded on and sustained by pure grace.⁵⁹ Because Mary is full of grace she also signifies in perfect totality, not just what is humanity, but, more particularly, what is woman. Mary is indeed, the culminating point and the preeminent paradigm of the profound dignity of woman.

So, what in particular does Mary reveal about the nature of woman? Full of grace, Mary responds to the Angel Gabriel with her *fiat*. This *fiat* is outwardly expressed and clarified briefly, but completely, through Mary's declaration of who she is and the relationship that she has with her Lord.⁶⁰ In referring to herself as the "handmaid of the Lord," Mary reveals her humility.⁶¹ Tina Beattie would instead offer that this epithet is but an androcentric construction created with the purpose of justifying

⁵² CCC 490.

⁵³ Lk 1:30.

⁵⁴ See Rom 5. Cf. Rom 1:5, 7

⁵⁵ *MD*, 4, 5.

⁵⁶ Saint Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 22, 4; PG 7/1, 959A, as cited in CCC 494. See also, *Epid.*, 11, and Saint Irenaeus, *A.H.*, 5, 6, 1, as cited in, Weinandy, "St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human," 20.

⁵⁷ As Saint John Paul II writes: "Mary is the representative and the archetype of the whole human race. She represents the humanity which belongs to all human beings, both men and women."

⁵⁸ Sweeney, "The Perfection of Women as Maternal and the Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła," 151; Karris, "The Gospel According to Luke," 681.

⁵⁹ *MD*, 4.

⁶⁰ Lk 1:38. See also, Karris, "The Gospel According to Luke," 681.

⁶¹ A humility obviously bearing the image and likeness of her Son. She knows who she is and where she stands as a creature in relation to her Creator as both a human person and as a woman. Cf. Phil 2:7.

masculine fantasies of feminine subjugation.⁶² However, through this self-given title, Mary reveals her femininity, the phrase “handmaid” calling to mind the description of woman as man’s “help” in Genesis. In referring to herself as the “handmaid of the Lord,” it is as if Mary is aligning herself with all women, and perhaps even with the “woman” of the *Protoevangelium* in Genesis 3.⁶³

Referring back to the previous chapter, both interpretations would seem to be reasonable conclusions. Humanity has been struggling and suffering for years under the weight of sin and its consequences. The direst of these consequences is death.⁶⁴ Mary’s *fiat* is a *fiat* to being that help that will save humanity from the danger of certain death.⁶⁵ Here the danger can still, in a sense, be described as “solitude.” Because of sin, the human person lives among others, in relationship with others, though not truly and not fully. The human person is also impeded from knowing and loving himself. Similarly, and even more fundamentally, while still being able to have some level of relationship and communion with his Creator, this relationship is severely “obscured” and “diminished.”⁶⁶ Humanity was thus living (and where sin abides, still lives) in a state of disunity/unnatural solitude.

But the Incarnation set all things right, removing the veil between humanity and God to restore the image and likeness of God in humanity.⁶⁷ Mary’s *fiat* is hence a *fiat* to being the ultimate human help, and in this sense, Mary is far more esteemed by the Church than Tina Beattie acknowledges. She is the help to the divine Help who came to serve and not to be served,⁶⁸ who laid down His life so that all may have life.⁶⁹ In her active receptivity to the will of God, Mary reveals what it truly means to be human, but more particularly she also reveals the openness that lies at the heart of being a woman and a mother.⁷⁰

⁶² Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 20-22.

⁶³ *MD*, 11.

⁶⁴ Cf. Gn 2:17; Prov 11:19; Eze 18:4; Rom 1:32; 5:12; 6:23.

⁶⁵ Such an interpretation also seems to marry with Saint John Paul II’s words: “Through her response of faith Mary exercises her free will and thus fully shares with her personal and feminine ‘I’ in the event of the Incarnation” (*MD*, 4).

⁶⁶ Refer back to Genesis 3. One can also draw a connection between Mary as handmaid of the Lord and the help of woman as revealed in Genesis, with the titles given to her by the Church, such as, Advocate and Helper (CCC 969. *LG*, 62). One may also readily call to mind other common titles ascribed to Mary, such as, “Mary, Help of Christians.”

⁶⁷ 2 Cor 3:12-16; 4:3.

⁶⁸ Mk 10:45.

⁶⁹ Cf. Jn 1:4; 3:19; 5:40; 8:12; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6 1 Jn 5:11.

⁷⁰ Kathleen Curran Sweeney, “The Perfection of Women as Maternal and the Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 9, no. 2 (2006): 150-51.

In looking at Mary, one can hence gain a sense of perfected humanity, but more specifically of perfect motherhood.⁷¹ Mary reveals that motherhood is part of God's original design for woman, as well as part of the redeemed order that Christ came to establish.⁷² In the beginning it was so, and, in the new beginning, one sees that it is still so as well as the glorious way in which it is so. Motherhood is hence more than just a function of necessity. God could have elected to reveal Himself in countless ways, yet He chose to be born of a woman. That this relationship of God to Mary is more than just one borne of necessity is evident in the intimate way in which this relationship continued after Christ came into the world, unto His death, and beyond.⁷³

2.3. Mary and Eve

That Mary was full of grace and free from sin calls to mind the only other woman in Scripture who was in this blessed state, albeit only for a period of time – Eve. The name and figure of Eve is brought to the forefront when looking at the work of redemption that Mary is intimately involved in. It was for Eve and Adam's sin that humanity needed a Redeemer, and it was to Eve that the coming of the Redeemer was first foretold.

2.3.1. From the New Adam, the New Eve

In a world marked by the effects of sin, Mary's sinlessness is exceptional. "But from the beginning, it was not so."⁷⁴ Genesis attests to the great dignity with which humanity was made and the great vocation for which humanity was made. But now, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, humanity aches with longing and a deep sense of incompleteness.⁷⁵ And so Scripture spends the first of Genesis' chapters portraying the sorrowful reality of this Fall from grace and the rest of the Old Testament, essentially depicting humanity's ceaseless struggle to recover this image and likeness and live according to it. At the same time Genesis also contains within it

⁷¹ Harrington and Cervantes, "Woman," 812.

⁷² Is 9:6-7. Cf. Mt 11:27; 28:18; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20-22; 2:15; Rev 19:16; etc.

⁷³ Such will be addressed further later on in this chapter, 3.4.

⁷⁴ Mt 19:8

⁷⁵ Zamfir, "The Quest for the "Eternal Feminine": An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman," 505.

God's own promise of hope that is carried by the Israelites in their awaiting the Redeemer.⁷⁶ Genesis 3:14-19, the first expression of this promise, is thus not only an expression of divine judgment but also an expression of hope born of divine grace.⁷⁷

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.⁷⁸

In these few lines, God foretells an end and a return. The end that He hails is the end of separation between humanity and its Creator, and all the suffering this separation entails.⁷⁹ The return that He proclaims is the return to the original intended order of creation, the return to communion, the return of the human person to being a clear image and likeness of his Creator. It is for these reasons that Genesis 3:15 is referred to as the *Protoevangelium*, “the first good news.” In this passage, the Church sees an announcement of the “New Adam” who will be the offspring to finally bruise the heel of the serpent.⁸⁰ This understanding is drawn from New Testament revelation.

One needs to turn to the New Testament in order to understand that the verses of the *Protoevangelium* are about the mission of Christ – the New Adam.⁸¹ Likewise, the central role that the “woman” plays in the Redemptive work of Christ and His triumph over sin, is also revealed upon reading the *Protoevangelium* in light of the New Testament. It is in concluding that the *Protoevangelium* is a foretelling of Christ Himself that one is able to hence conclude that the “woman” referred to is thus Mary. As the seed has just been revealed to be Christ, the “woman,” the one whose seed is victorious, is the mother of Christ.

⁷⁶ For example, see Is 25:9; 63:9; Eze 37:23; Hab 1:2; Zeph 3:19; Zech 10:6; Jn 1:41; 4:25; Rom 9:27; and so forth.

⁷⁷ Acts 2:26-7. Cf. Ps 16:10; Acts 13:35; 1 Cor 15:55

⁷⁸ Gn 3:15.

⁷⁹ Cf. Rom 5:6, 10, 11; 2 Cor 5:18

⁸⁰ 1 Cor 15:25. Cf. Ps 110:1; Mt 22:44; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:8. Cf. Heb 10:12. Cf. Heb 7:27; 9:14; 10:10, 14. See also, Maja Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another,” *Anglican Theological Review* 84, no. 3 (2002): 610; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17*, 197; and, CCC 441.

⁸¹ Indeed, the consideration of the first man and his fall from grace in light of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ appears to be primarily Pauline. Cf. Rom 5:14. Cf. Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49.

Saint John Paul II notes that it is significant that Saint Paul does not refer to the mother of the Son of God as by her name, “Mary,” but speaks of her simply as “woman.”⁸² In doing such, Saint Paul is not doing Mary an injustice, calling her “woman” as if reducing her identity to her sex alone as one hears people doing today as a form of insult. Instead, Saint Paul is affirming the connection between Mary and the “woman” referred to as somewhat of a heroine in the *Protoevangelium*.⁸³ Mary is the “woman” who is there at the central event of redemption which marks the fullness of time, an event which is actualised in her and through her. It is thus in Genesis 3:15 that one finds the principal connection between Mary and Eve, as well as a hint of the central role the mother of the “seed” plays in redemption.⁸⁴

The New Eve

And since the redemption is to be accomplished through a struggle against evil - through the “enmity” between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of him who, as “the father of lie,”⁸⁵ is the first author of sin in human history - it is also an enmity between him and the woman. These words give us a comprehensive view of the whole of Revelation, first as a preparation for the Gospel and later as the Gospel itself. From this vantage point the two female figures, Eve and Mary, are joined under the name of woman.⁸⁶

Saint Edith Stein holds to the interpretation that the terms “woman” and “offspring” which are found in the *Protoevangelium*, definitely designate the Mother of God and the Redeemer.⁸⁷ Yet she does not deem this interpretation to be restrictive. Mary, the Mother of God, is obviously and primarily present in the prophetic words of the *Protoevangelium*. Nonetheless, one cannot then deduce that Genesis 3:15 does not also speak about Eve, the “mother of all living,” to whom God actually uttered these words. As will become evident, through the “woman” of the *Protoevangelium*, Eve and Mary are fundamentally linked by their womanhood as well as their motherhood.⁸⁸

⁸² *MD*, 11.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 11.

⁸⁴ Gal 4:4. Cf. Jn 1:14.

⁸⁵ Jn 8:44.

⁸⁶ *MD*, 11.

⁸⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 63. See also CCC 410-411; and *MD*, 11.

⁸⁸ Stein, *Woman*, 63.

There are many meanings that can be drawn from the Eve-Mary analogy.⁸⁹ But of pertinence is the interpretation which sees Mary as the complete revelation of all that is meant by the biblical word “woman,” a revelation corresponding with the mystery of Redemption.⁹⁰ Mary is not only “the woman” of Genesis 3:15, she, in a matter of speaking, goes beyond this figure to the original figure of woman – Eve. Being “full of grace,” Mary returns to the beginning where one sees woman in her original intended state, “as she was intended to be in creation, and therefore in the eternal mind of God: in the bosom of the most Holy Trinity.”⁹¹

One can readily see that Eve and Mary bear significant likenesses. As noted, this soteriological connection stems primarily from Saint Irenaeus’ theology of recapitulation. In response to this coupling, Tina Beattie asks, “Is this simply another example of the convoluted typology of Patristic writings, so that the virginity of the two women offers a satisfying symmetry between the story of Eve’s temptation and Mary’s annunciation?”⁹² Avoiding the unfortunate conclusion of determining Saint Irenaeus’ work as “convoluted typology,” Benjamin H. Dunning acknowledges that the Eve-Mary contrast is simply driven by the aesthetic appeal of symmetry, but that this explanation is unsatisfactory. Benjamin H. Dunning thus opens the prospect, if not the necessity, of looking into the soteriological coupling of Eve and Mary as connected to, but yet distinct from the primary coupling of Adam and Christ and affirms the role of sexual difference in the work of Redemption.⁹³ In light of what has so far been iterated, this seems to be a far more plausible and worthwhile conclusion.

Rather than being figures soteriologically opposed to each other, Saint John Paul II states that, “Mary assumes in herself and embraces the mystery of the ‘woman’ whose beginning is Eve, ‘the mother of all living’.”⁹⁴ She does so, first and foremost, by assuming and embracing this mystery within the mystery of Jesus Christ – the New

⁸⁹ *MD*, 11. See also, Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another,” 613-14. See also, Barker, “Mary’s Motherhood Matters Most,” 34.

⁹⁰ *MD*, 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid* (emphasis omitted). Note here that Saint John Paul II often adds emphasis to most of his written works. This thesis has left most of the emphasis in the quotes it cited, and it has noted where this is not so.)

⁹² Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 175.

⁹³ Benjamin H. Dunning, “Virgin Earth. Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons”, *The Journal of Religion* 89, no. 1 (2009): 59-60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

Adam.⁹⁵ Eve is “the mother of all living,” Mary the mother of Life Himself as well the new life that will be made possible through her Son.⁹⁶ Eve was present at the beginning, a witness to life before the Fall, a life where humanity was living in accord with God in His image and likeness. Mary was not present to the beginning described in Genesis, but she is witness to the new beginning and new creation that Christ brings about.⁹⁷ In this sense, both can be rightly termed sources of all life - Eve, the source of life for all humanity, Mary the source of the fullness of Life who overcomes the death destined for all as a result of the Fall. Both Eve and Mary can thus be upheld as the greatest and truest of mothers.

In accord with this notion, one can further see that as Eve was the first woman of creation, so to Mary is the first woman of the new creation. Mary thus becomes the new beginning, the new first woman, the New Eve. In her one can see the dignity and vocation of woman restored. And so it is, Saint John Paul II offers, that Mary exclaims in praise, “He who is mighty has done great things for me.”⁹⁸ First and foremost, these words are uttered in reference to her being chosen to bear the Son of God. However, as Saint John Paul II writes, these words:

Can also signify the discovery of her own feminine humanity. He “has done great things for me”: this is the discovery of all the richness and personal resources of femininity, all the eternal originality of the “woman”, just as God wanted her to be, a person for her own sake, who discovers herself “by means of a sincere gift of self.”⁹⁹

Beyond the likenesses, however, it seems as though the relationship between Mary and Eve is more commonly characterised by contrast rather than comparison. The nature of the relationship between Eve and Mary was explored by the Church Fathers. In their works, one can find statements akin to that of: “Death through Eve, life through

⁹⁵ The Lucan genealogy specifically identifies Christ as the Son of Adam, Son of God (Lk 3:38). Cf. 1 Cor 15:45. Cf. Rom 5:12-14, 17-21; 1 Cor 15:47-49.

⁹⁶ Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another”, 621). See also Thomas Weinandy, “The Annunciation and Nativity: Undoing the Sinful Act of Eve,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 2 (2012): 218-20.

⁹⁷ *MD*, 11. Cf. Is 65:17; Jn 3:3; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17.

⁹⁸ Lk 1:49.

⁹⁹ *MD*, 11. Cf. Gal 4:4.

Mary.”¹⁰⁰ Saint Irenaeus, moreover, explained: “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.”¹⁰¹ Saint Justin Martyr (*d.* Rome, *c.* 165) writes that this came to be as Eve, likewise a virgin, listened to the word of the serpent and so gave birth to sin and death, whilst the Virgin Mary listened to the word of the Angel Gabriel and so gave birth to life.¹⁰² Saint Edith Stein similarly writes, “As woman was the first to be tempted, so did God’s message of grace come first to a woman, and each time woman’s assent determined the destiny of humanity as a whole.”¹⁰³ None of these statements explicitly condemn Eve, but one can see how strong negative perceptions of Eve as the door through which evil entered the world could be drawn from them.

Tina Beattie proposes that such “harsh” references to Eve as the harbinger or icon of death, so to speak, stem from Saint Paul’s references to Adam as such: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”¹⁰⁴ Why, then, does there seem to be a stronger negative emphasis placed on Eve than on Adam?¹⁰⁵ In reading Genesis 3, one discovers that, chronologically, Eve was seduced by the serpent before Adam and it was she who in turn tempted Adam.¹⁰⁶

Korinna Zamfir “solves” the problem of interpreting this verse by writing it off as Deutero-Pauline distorted theology. The seemingly harsh negative portrayal of Eve, she posits, is nothing other than evidence of Hellenistic misogyny. For example, she upholds that 1 Tim 2 describes Eve, “as second-rank creature, as an exclusively negative character, as seduced, therefore weak, and seductress, therefore dangerous

¹⁰⁰ Saint Epiphanius, *Panarion* 2.78.18.5: PG 42, 728CD-729AB; Saint Jerome, Ep. 22, 21: PL 22, 408, as cited in CCC 494.

¹⁰¹ Saint Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 22, 4: PG 7/1, 959A, as cited in CCC 494. See also, Dunning, “Virgin Earth. Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons,” 57.

¹⁰² Justin, *dial.* (*Dialogus cum Tryphone*) 100, 4-6 (E. J. Goodspeed [ed.], *Die altesten Apologeten* [Gottingen, 1984, 2nd ed.] 215), as cited in Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another,” 616.

¹⁰³ Stein, *Woman*, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 47. See also, 1 Cor 15:22, 45. O.P. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. S.S. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1990), 812.

¹⁰⁵ Note that this ‘stronger emphasis’ is not a negation of Adam’s guilt. In Paul’s writings, Adam is presented as having an archetypal status, a representative of all sinners. “For in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). See also, Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another,” 611.

¹⁰⁶ Gn 3:1-6. Cf. 1 Tim 2:13-14.

and assigning her the whole responsibility of the Fall.”¹⁰⁷ This does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation for what is indeed divine Revelation. Saint John Paul II also points out in *MD* that, aside from the distinction of roles in the account of the Fall, original sin is the sin of humanity, of the “first parents”, both Eve and Adam.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, what Korinna Zamfir and Tina Beattie do achieve is an awareness of how early perceptions of the person of Eve came to be projected onto understandings of who woman is. “It is thus not Eve the helper, sharing the same human essence with the man, united to him in love and completing him, who becomes the type of the ‘eternal feminine’, but an Eve who is both intellectually and morally inferior to the man, the weak and dangerous Eve.”¹⁰⁹ What both are essentially saying is that, because Eve is looked to as a type of womanhood, it is from these dim perceptions of Eve that humanity forms its perception of what woman is.¹¹⁰

Perhaps in order to avoid the unjust synonymy of the ‘evil’ of Eve with every woman, Maja Weyerman concludes that in relation to Redemption, one cannot speak of the persons or works of Eve, Adam, Mary, or even Christ, as having unique pertinence to men or women.¹¹¹ However, as Thomas G. Weinandy notes in his purview of the works of Saint Bernard and Saint Bonaventure, making the juxtaposition between Eve and Mary is to allow Mary to assume a unique and effective role in the Incarnation. He writes: “As Eve was co-responsible, through her words and deeds, for the sinful race of Adam, so Mary is now ‘co-responsible’, through her words and deeds for the recreation of Adam’s sinful race.”¹¹²

Through this acknowledgment of co-responsibility, sexual difference is by no means negated.¹¹³ On the contrary, it is wholly affirmed and reckoned as having a

¹⁰⁷ Zamfir, “The Quest for the ‘Eternal Feminine’: An Essay on the Effective History of Gen 1-3 with Respect to the Woman,” 521.

¹⁰⁸ *MD*, 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another”, 609; see also, Barker, “Mary’s Motherhood Matters Most,” 35; and, Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another,” 621.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 625-26. Furthermore, Weyerman concludes that denigrate all women based on an interpretation of the type of Eve being one synonymous with woman and evil are grossly misinformed. (*Ibid.*, 626.)

¹¹² Weinandy, “The Annunciation and Nativity: Undoing the Sinful Act of Eve,” 228. Note here that Thomas G. Weinandy is taking into consideration Saint Bonaventure’s: *Collationes* [Sermons on the Gospel of John] (53. Translation from Tavad, *The Forthbringer*, 88), and his *Commentary* on the Gospel of Luke (1.70, 81-2) as well as Saint Bernard’s ‘On the Lord’s Advent,’ Sermon 2.5 (*Sermons for Advent and the Christmas Season*, 17-18), as well as his ‘Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption’ (in *St. Bernard’s Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 206-7).

¹¹³ Little, *The Church and the Culture War. Secular Anarchy or Sacred Order*, 135.

fundamental place in the work of Redemption. Mary's inclusion in God's redemptive work and in the formation of the New and everlasting Covenant proves the great dignity of woman; and, just as the accounts of Genesis bespeak a profound and necessary difference between male and female, so too does the New Covenant reveal motherhood as a distinctly feminine gift, necessary for the Redemptive works of Christ.¹¹⁴ Despite the conclusion of subjectivity reached by Maja Weyerman, one hence must speak of the persons and works of these four figures as having a unique pertinence to men and women.¹¹⁵ There is thus a need to solidify the objective roles that Eve, Adam, Mary, and Christ have in the work of Redemption as representatives for humanity, and more particularly as representatives of femininity and masculinity. It is precisely for this reason that this thesis can and does turn specifically to Eve and Mary as the types of femininity.

Realising the objectivity of Eve and Mary as examples of femininity, perhaps Tina Beattie is correct in what seems to be her sense of pity for such negative treatments of Eve. It most certainly seems worthwhile to note that attribution of blame to Eve over and above Adam, may have rippled into earlier prejudices against women, and perhaps even into current perceptions.¹¹⁶ Perhaps, in somewhat of an agreement on this point, but still with a clear distinction of holiness in place, it is for this reason that Saint John Paul II earlier wrote: "In Mary, Eve discovers the nature of the true dignity of woman, of feminine humanity. This discovery must continually reach the heart of every woman and shape her vocation and her life."¹¹⁷ In this brief statement Saint John Paul II makes apparent what Tina Beattie vaguely refers to as "symbolic reconciliation." Furthermore, he reveals how this reconciliation is substantially more than just "symbolic" but something absolute and indeed objectively applicable to the unique femininity of every woman.

Tina Beattie's notion of "reconciliation" between Mary and Eve does not appear to be this authentic, restorative reconciliation that Saint John Paul II speaks of, where, joint to Mary, Eve is reconciled to the fullness of her womanhood. Rather, Tina Beattie instead seems to be speaking of a reconciliation of dependency, that sees Eve remain

¹¹⁴ This conclusion corresponds to what has so far been expounded from the topical works of Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein. See also, *ibid*, 126).

¹¹⁵ *MD*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Beattie, *God's Mother, Eve's Advocate*, 12. See also, Barker, "Mary's Motherhood Matters Most," 34.

¹¹⁷ *MD*, 11 (emphasis omitted).

in her state of “obscurity” and “diminishment” necessarily joint with Mary due to Mary’s inability to symbolise the fullness of feminine sexuality. This is clearly contrary to Saint John Paul II’s and Saint Edith Stein’s conceptions of Mary and of redemption.¹¹⁸

The Reasonability of Mary as Exemplar

“‘*Theotókos*’, also signifies the fullness of the perfection of what is characteristic of woman”, of ‘what is feminine’. Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women.”¹¹⁹

In the pursuit of their personhood, Saint Edith Stein acknowledged that the individual must have an objective image of humanity that they can aspire to. In accord with this, man must be educated to perfect manhood and woman to perfect womanhood. Saint Edith Stein’s hopes for and endeavours of pedagogical reform were hence centered around studies on the true nature and vocation of woman.¹²⁰ The image of perfect humanity is of course found in Christ.¹²¹ But, in order to become like something, one must have some idea, some picture of that thing which they aspire to imitate. Having established that sexual difference does indeed have objective value, it would seem that woman need have an objective image of womanhood to aspire to.

A large part of the importance Tina Beattie places on Eve in her writings is due to her perception of the absolute uniqueness of Mary as a woman. She thus asks if Mary is an impossible ideal for women to aspire to.¹²² Furthermore, contrary to both Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein, she actually asserts that forming one’s feminine identity on Mary is “disfiguring” and “self-destructive.” She posits such for she believes that the image of Mary is governed by an androcentric ideal of maternal femininity and is thus unrealistic and harmful.¹²³ Through the work of Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein, it will become clear that this is not so and that conformation to the feminine ideal presented in Mary is indeed redemptive and fulfilling.

¹¹⁸ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 12.

¹¹⁹ *MD*, 5.

¹²⁰ Barker, “Mary’s Motherhood Matters Most,” 34.

¹²¹ As will be briefly expounded on later, it can also secondarily be found in Mary.

¹²² See also, Tina Beattie, “Redeeming Mary: The Potential of Marian Symbolism for Feminist Philosophy of Religion,” in *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings* (London: Routledge, 2004), 115.

¹²³ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 20; see also 21, in which Tina Beattie illustrates why she thinks men constructed and uphold these “harmful” Marian ideologies of femininity.

In an immediate response to Tina Beattie, one might ask if turning to Mary as exemplar is destructive, then who ought women turn to? Do they then turn to Eve? Although before the Fall Eve was indeed living in accord with her nature and vocation, what is revealed about Eve's sinless self is almost nought. From the creation accounts, one learns of how she was created and what she was created for, but there are no examples, no narratives of her living such out, only the narrative of her falling from this blessed state. How, then, ought one try and imitate that which they have no substantial image of? Reason would have it that turning to Eve alone as the exemplar of womanhood is, by no means, practical or reasonable. As just mentioned, Saint John Paul II affirms that Eve only realises the nature of the "true dignity of woman," and indeed "of feminine humanity" in Mary.¹²⁴ Mary was not only in that original state of sinlessness that Eve was created in but lived fully in the glorious new life brought about by her Son. In this sense, the physical and spiritual communion Mary had with God, superseded the communion Eve originally had with God. Why then would one be content to turn to an incomplete image of woman, when one can turn to the perfect image?

As noted with Tina Beattie, to say that Mary is indeed a realistic model for all women today is greeted with objection.¹²⁵ Irene Oh states that, "The maternal expectation set by glorified depictions of Mary is unrealistic and, moreover, ignores the social realities and web of mutual concern that surrounds the parent-child relationship."¹²⁶ This "impossibly high bar" of motherhood set by such as Saint John Paul II in his reflections on Mary, is only made possible, she proffers, due to the absence of personal testimony from Mary herself. In other words, Irene Oh insinuates that, if Mary had recorded her testimony on how it was to be *Theotokos*, her shared experiences would render it impossible to paint Mary and her motherhood idyllically. She thus concludes that, "Motherly love personified through the singular example of Mary is not only radically misunderstood but also ethically negligent."¹²⁷ Like Tina Beattie, Irene Oh does not appear to propose an alternate exemplar, however.

¹²⁴ *MD*, 11 (emphasis omitted).

¹²⁵ Irene Oh, "Motherhood in Christianity and Islam: Critiques, Realities, and Possibilities," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38, no. 4 (2010): 640-41.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 640.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 641.

The underlying point raised by Tina Beattie is that, even if one earnestly did desire to imitate this “androcentric” presentation of Mary, they turn to her and immediately see the seemingly unrelatable truth that she is simultaneously and perfectly both virgin and mother.¹²⁸ Looking just a little farther, they see that, from the moment of her conception and for the entirety of her life, she is full of grace, wholly and perfectly preserved from the stain of original sin.¹²⁹ So, then it is asked if Mary is in fact too holy for women to relate to?

Indeed, in reading such as Tina Beattie, Mary Barker, and Irene Oh, it seems more that, whilst it is hard to conceive how Mary can be both perfectly mother and perfectly virgin, the struggle to perceive her as an exemplar comes from a disproportionate emphasis one of these traits to the detriment of the other. This is, most frequently, the exaggerated emphasis placed on the superiority of Mary’s virginity to the neglect or belittling of Mary’s motherhood.¹³⁰ In answer to this, Mary Barker moves to the other extreme, emphasising Mary’s motherhood over and above all as it was indeed for her yes to mothering Christ that she is so esteemed. However, her response is still disproportionate and thus unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, it does seem pertinent that one considers her urging that, “An understanding of Mary as the Mother of God in the Church today needs a radical rethinking if she is to become again a model for our time.”¹³¹ Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein, speaking of motherhood and virginity as equally fundamental characteristics of femininity, seem to be closer yet to providing a holistic and feminine theology of Mary, and thus of woman.

One might also ask such as Tina Beattie and Irene Oh how it is that Christ can name Himself as the exemplar for all humanity, yet any mention of Mary as such is unrealistic and misogynistic. Perhaps to likewise render Christ as exemplar may seem as unrealistic to them as the labeling of Mary as exemplar. Yet, this would seem somewhat of a questionable conclusion given that it was Christ Himself who determined that He was humanity’s exemplar, not later commentators. Christ explicitly commands people to become like Him.¹³² This call seems vastly more

¹²⁸ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 115. See also, Fastiggi, “Mary: Exemplar of Faithful Love for Virgins, Spouses, Mothers, and the Church,” 347.

¹²⁹ Refer to the earlier sections of this chapter.

¹³⁰ See also, Sawyer, “Hidden Subjects: Rereading Eve and Mary,” 306.

¹³¹ Barker, “Mary’s Motherhood Matters Most,” 37.

¹³² Mk 5:48 and 8:34. See also, Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 338; and Finlayson, “Guardians of Spousal and Maternal Love,” 390.

unrealistic than the call to imitate Mary, yet God Himself is the one who called and still calls the human person to do so.¹³³ And so it is that Saint Paul can urge, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children,” for, now that God has revealed Himself, humanity has something that it is able to imitate.¹³⁴ The ability to affirm the reasonability of Christ as the exemplar for humanity thus gives a basis to speak likewise of Mary.

The nature in which both Christ and Mary can be said to be exemplars for humanity is not exclusive. It is not a matter of one or the other. In fact, Mary is only an exemplar in so far as she is one with Christ.¹³⁵ Such is the purpose and end of every person, and such is what one sees exemplified in the person of Mary. She bears both physically as well as spiritually within herself, the One that she was created to image. Conceiving Christ in her womb, she contained the *imago Dei* within her in the fullest sense. Hence, in an especial way, Mary is the exemplar of womanhood, the feminine form of the Christian image.¹³⁶ Saint Edith Stein hence states that, as Mary is the prototype of perfect womanhood, the goal of a female’s education must be the imitation of Mary.¹³⁷ She expounds:

Just as the goal of all human education is presented to us in a concrete, vital, and personal way through Christ, so also the goal of all women’s education is presented to us through Mary. The most significant evidence of the eternal meaning and value to be found in sexual differentiation lies in the fact that the new Eve stands beside the new Adam on the threshold between the Old and the New Covenants. God chose as the instrument of His incarnation a human mother, and in her He presented the perfect image of a mother.

If one were to present an image, or rather, *the* image, of the purely developed character of spouse and mother, one would present an image of the Virgin Mary to gaze upon.¹³⁸

¹³³ The call to obtain perfection is not a concept that finds its origins in Christ. (I.e., see: Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:26; Deut 18:13; 2 Sam 22:31.) But it is one that finds its fullness in Christ, one that finds in Christ the goal which it has always been tending towards, but prior to Christ, had never had that image of that to which it was aiming (Stein, *Woman*, 190).

¹³⁴ Eph 5:1. Cf. 1 Cor 11:1; Cor 7:1; Col 1:28; 1 Thes 1:6; 1 Jn 3:3.

¹³⁵ See *ibid*, 189-90. “Mary’s function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power...But the Blessed Virgin’s salutary influence on men...flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it, and draws all its power from it.” (CCC 970.)

¹³⁶ Stein, *Woman*, 191, 92.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 189. Similarly, Saint John Paul II also wholly affirms this hailing of Mary as exemplar. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*. (MD, 5.)

¹³⁸ Barker, “Mary’s Motherhood Matters Most,” 33. See also *ibid*, 34.

In turning to Mary as the exemplar of woman and, in particular, of motherhood, one is then led to ask: what is it that women are called to imitate? As Tina Beattie asked, how exactly can it be considered realistic to be asked to imitate a grace-filled and sinless woman? Here Robert L. Fastiggi interjects with the clarification that an exemplar itself is more than just a model. “An exemplar is also an ideal, an archetype, a paradigm.”¹³⁹ It is with this understanding that all of humanity is called to imitate Christ.

The human being possessed a perfect nature prior to the unfortunate event of the Fall, whereupon the image and likeness of God in humanity was “obscured” and “diminished.” The archetype of perfect humanity came true in the human person of Christ – the New Adam¹⁴⁰ - and the paradigm of perfect womanhood was made manifest in the form of Mary - the New Eve.¹⁴¹ Being both virgin and mother does not determine Mary a “sexless ideal.” Rather, her person presents an image of sexuality free from the consequences of the sexual inequality and physical suffering that resulted from the Fall, of sexuality redeemed and ennobled by Christ.¹⁴² It is with this underlying principle in mind that Saint John Paul II writes that no man or woman can even hope to attain any fulfillment apart from the image and likeness of Mary.¹⁴³

However, Tina Beattie’s notion of “reconciliation” between Mary and Eve does not appear to be this authentic, restorative reconciliation that Saint John Paul II speaks of, where, joint to Mary, Eve is reconciled to the fullness of her womanhood. Rather, Tina Beattie at a point speaks of a reconciliation of dependency, that sees Eve remain in her state of “obscurity” and “diminishment” necessarily joint with Mary due to Mary’s inability to symbolise the fullness of feminine sexuality. As mentioned in the last chapter, she upholds that any and every viable attempt to restore the original symbolic significance of woman’s body as having an essential place in the Christian theological narrative, must spend much of its attention focusing on the original woman – Eve.¹⁴⁴ In a similar light but with a greater awareness of Mary’s role in the redemption of femininity, Barker asserts that, “Mary is a sign of the restoration of women to Eve’s

¹³⁹ Ibid, 33.

¹⁴⁰ For more, read, Gerald O’Collins, S.J., *Christology. A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, Second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁴¹ And, indeed, she is also the exemplar of perfect humanity for men. Saint John Paul II writes that “Mary, the woman of the Bible, is the most complete expression of this [human] dignity and vocation.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ *MD*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 12.

condition of original goodness before the fall, and as such she represents women's freedom from the traditional roles in which they have been cast."¹⁴⁵ However, whilst more in line with Saint John Paul II's Mariology, this interpretation is unfortunately void of the ennobling aspect of Christ's redemptive work.

In considering the relationship between Eve and Mary, one could recall the Christological image of a veil being lifted. In this sense, the veil of sin that obscured and diminished the image of womanhood that was behind it, finds itself removed in Mary. The image is thus once again clear for all to see. Such a metaphor could be spoken of in terms of an artwork in a gallery. Masterfully created, the image clearly depicted who woman was. The event of sin saw a veil being placed over the artwork. This veil was not one hundred percent opaque, so that one could still see elements of what lay behind, but opaque enough that it was impossible to truly perceive what, or rather, who, lay behind it. Although marked by a great sense of ambiguity and almost complete unintelligibility, this was the image all looked to, man and woman alike, in order to see who woman was. The artwork was every woman, but it was so obscured and diminished that those who looked to it were left either with uncertainty or with a wrong perception of who woman is.

Then, in His great mercy, the Artist came in person to the gallery to remove the veil and show everyone once again, through His whole life and through the life of His mother, who woman is. However, in lifting the veil, the image that was revealed was not the same as it was originally. Although not exactly the same, the image was not essentially different either. It was still woman, but it was woman even more perfect, even more precise, even more apparent. The woman was Eve, but Christ's action of lifting the veil through His coming personally to the gallery was, in a sense, metamorphic. The artwork was still Eve, her form was still there, but renewed and transformed by the Artist, the woman presented now bore the image of His own mother - Mary.

Beyond its inherent flaws, this analogy serves to demonstrate the relationship between Eve and Mary. Mary as the renewed image of woman, is not a completely new

¹⁴⁵ Barker, "Mary's Motherhood Matters Most," 34.

image.¹⁴⁶ God did not do away with the old. To infer such would imply that the old was flawed, even though He Himself had declared it “very good.”¹⁴⁷ In Mary, therefore, God does not create a new species of woman, so to speak, but redemptively recreates the old through the work of His Son, the newness of life that He brings about, and Mary’s *fiat* to it all. Eve is thus not overshadowed by Mary, but assumed and perfected in her. It is with this understanding that Mary is referred to as the New Eve. And it is for this reason that Mary is the one whom all women must turn to in order to understand who they are as women and what their gift of femininity entails.

Mary is thus the quintessential exemplar of an ideal or transcendent image of femininity.¹⁴⁸ The image of woman that one finds in Mary is the perfect image, as, in her grace-filled state, she demonstrates the basic spiritual attitude which corresponds to woman’s natural vocation. – motherhood.¹⁴⁹ In Mary herself one finds the joyous triumph of the emancipation of woman from the onerous consequences of the Fall. “Eve and all the women of history are caught up and transformed in Mary’s joy,” for Mary’s joy is the joy of the redeemed and fulfilled woman.¹⁵⁰ When woman is asking who/what she ought to be, she thus needs to turn to Mary, the Mother of God.

Thus, having established Mary as *Theotokos* to be the exemplar of womanhood and hence also of motherhood, this thesis turns to her now to try and elucidate what specifically Mary reveals about woman and her vocation.

¹⁴⁶ See, Weyermann, “The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another,” 612. If taking “human being” to mean the divinely intended form of the human person, this conclusion that there is but one human being corresponds satisfactorily to the point being made about Mary being the perfected image of woman, as opposed to an entirely new image. There is then also no discrepancy between the New Testament revelations of Mary and Christ and the Genesis revelation that humanity is but one kind, not many.

¹⁴⁷ Gn 1:31. Refer to prior chapter.

¹⁴⁸ Barker, “Mary’s Motherhood Matters Most,” 33.

¹⁴⁹ Stein, *Woman*, 58, 190-95.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 130.

2.3.2. *Eve, Mary, and the Vocation of Motherhood*

Motherhood: Prelapsarian or Postlapsarian?

The fourth chapter of *MD* sees Saint John Paul II enucleating the consequences suffered as a result of the Fall.¹⁵¹ The sin of Adam and Eve causes the faculties of the human person to be stifled, inclining them towards self, and so death.¹⁵² Man and woman alike suffer these consequences, yet Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein also point towards inheritances of original sin specific to the genders.¹⁵³

Theologians have speculated as to whether or not woman was called to fulfill the command to be fruitful and multiply before the Fall. Did woman still give birth, just without pain? Was there a need to physically have children at all? Yet, it must be remembered that, even though Eve was only referred to as “mother” after the Fall, it was prior to the Fall that God “blessed” humanity with the imperative to be fruitful and multiply. Bearing children was hence not a consequence of sin, but simply the natural and blessed consequence of self-donation. The interpretation that fruitfulness was entirely spiritual prior to the Fall is essentially dualistic, implying an inherent evil in the physical.¹⁵⁴ But God deemed all of His creation good, the physical as well as the spiritual.

The blessing and imperative to be fruitful and multiply was then reaffirmed after God recreated the world by the Great Flood.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, it is clear in Genesis 3:16 that God did not describe birth as woman’s punishment, only the pain that accompanies it. Similarly, for man, working the ground was a blessing before the Fall and only a source of suffering afterwards.¹⁵⁶ Such an interpretation would be in line with the points about the ways in which humanity bears God’s image and likeness that were discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁵¹ *MD*, 9-11.

¹⁵² Allen, “*Mulieris Dignitatem* Twenty Years Later: An Overview of the Document and Challenges,” 24.

¹⁵³ *MD*, IV – EVE-MARY. This line of thought is similarly evident in Saint John Paul II’s earlier work, *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 109-14). See also, Stein, *Woman*, 73, as well as the entirety of Chapter II - The Separate Vocation of Man and Woman According to Nature and Grace.

¹⁵⁴ The dangers of which were briefly touched on earlier in this chapter.

¹⁵⁵ Gn 9:1.

¹⁵⁶ See Gn 2 and 3.

Eve, hence, reveals that motherhood was a reality and indeed a blessing prior to the Fall. That motherhood remains woman's vocation after the Fall is perhaps even a greater blessing due to it still being a great source of joy for woman, despite the pain, but even more so due its being coupled with the promise of Redemption. When the Redeemer comes, Mary as His mother reveals that motherhood is still a definite part of the Creator's design and now also has an esteemed role in redeemed humanity. Together, both Eve as "mother of all living," and Mary as the mother of Life Himself – Jesus Christ – unanimously declare that motherhood is a significant, if not the defining characteristic of their womanhood.¹⁵⁷

The Unique Vocation of Woman

*And, "Woman's vocation, in accordance with creation, is the vocation to the service of life. She is Eve, that is to say, the mother of all the living (Gen 3:20)."*¹⁵⁸

The truth is that one cannot discern how the blessing of fertility was to be fulfilled by humanity before the Fall, something that Saint Edith Stein makes note of.¹⁵⁹ Only Eve, Adam, and the Lord were revealed as being present in the garden, and none of them provide an account of such. Yet, the fact that Christ chose to take on flesh through being born of a woman proves the *Protoevangelium* and reveals that motherhood undoubtedly has a place in Redemption.¹⁶⁰ From the beginning, by the intention of the Creator, woman's nature thus inclined her towards procreation and the education of posterity. This is evident in the blessing and imperative of fruitfulness and multiplication that she shares with man, as well as the unique title she bears - "mother of all living."¹⁶¹

Saint Edith Stein also notes that the differences of punishments meted out to humanity in Genesis 3 are indicative of woman's innate vocation to motherhood.¹⁶² Man and woman are distinguished as different upon their creation, but before the Fall God does

¹⁵⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 192.

¹⁵⁸ Kasper, "The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology," 61. This quote lays out a general definition of woman's 'vocation.' As this thesis continues, the term 'vocation' will continue to be used and in reference to this meaning, namely, in woman's inherent call to the service of life. The term "Vocation" will also be used, but in a more specific reference to the Vocations of marriage and consecrated virginity.

¹⁵⁹ Weyermann, "The Typologies of Adam-Christ and Eve-Mary, and Their Relationship to One Another," 612.

¹⁶⁰ *MD*, 11.

¹⁶¹ Barker, "Mary's Motherhood Matters Most," 33.

¹⁶² Stein, *Woman*, 62.

not assign tasks to man and woman separately. As far as one can glean from the text, the tasks He assigned were given to humanity as a whole.¹⁶³

On the fundamental level of their nature as human beings, man and woman suffer the consequences of sin in the same way.¹⁶⁴ The consequence of sin for both is still ultimately death and separation from God.¹⁶⁵ However, as man and woman are different, the Fall furthermore affected, and still affects, them differently. This is not to say that the consequences of sin affected man and woman to varying degrees, but rather, as their persons are different, as the way the image the likeness of God in them is different, so to their non-likeness to God on the level of their sexuality is different.¹⁶⁶

That the consequence described for the woman is related to that of childbirth reveals the inclination of her nature to the personal.¹⁶⁷ From this punishment it appears that it is through this capacity, through her natural vocation to care for and nurture life that woman most especially images her Creator. As aforementioned, Saint Edith Stein attributes motherhood as one of the key characteristics of woman. Saint John Paul II likewise identifies motherhood and also virginity as the two dimensions of the fulfillment of woman's personality.¹⁶⁸ It is in Mary, he then urges, that these two dimensions essential to woman's person find their full meaning and value.¹⁶⁹ In accord with woman's nature and as perfected in the order of grace, Saint John Paul II explains motherhood as being intimately connected to the personal structure of who woman is and to her unique vocation to be a self-gift.¹⁷⁰ It is thus through the vocation of motherhood that woman discovers who she is.

In this sense, Mary indeed can be said to serve as the ultimate exemplar of motherhood due to her unobscured and undiminished *fiat* at the Annunciation, signifying her whole-hearted openness to readily accept new life. Mary's great *fiat* was an assent to the vocation of motherhood and, hence, an assent to all that motherhood entails. At the

¹⁶³ Refer back to Gn 1:26-28.

¹⁶⁴ *MD*, 10.

¹⁶⁵ Refer to previous chapter.

¹⁶⁶ *MD*, 9-11.

¹⁶⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 34. See also, Castilla de Cortazar, "So God Created Man in His Own Image," 73; and, Harrington and Cervantes, "Woman", and, Barker, "Mary's Motherhood Matters Most."

¹⁶⁸ Dunning, "Virgin Earth. Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons," 61-62.

¹⁶⁹ *MD*, 17.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 18. See also, Little, *The Church and the Culture War. Secular Anarchy or Sacred Order*, 126; and, Sweeney, "The Perfection of Women as Maternal and the Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła," 151.

Annunciation, she gave herself completely and accepted every aspect of self-sacrifice that motherhood entails,¹⁷¹ “the exemplar of human love as self-donation and interpersonal communion.”¹⁷² In Mary one sees that physical and spiritual openness to life is the foundational and essential disposition of motherhood. Similarly, for all women, just as the motherhood of Mary was preceded by her *fiat*, so too motherhood involves a particular openness on the part of woman, “a gift of interior readiness to accept the child and bring it into the world.”¹⁷³

Mary as the exemplar of womanhood and Mary as the exemplar of motherhood are hence inseparable. Through Mary’s motherhood she realises her womanhood. Together, Eve and Mary hence reveal that motherhood is an essential part of womanhood. Indeed, “The mystery of woman is revealed in motherhood.”¹⁷⁴ What, then, does the mother of Christ reveal about the actual nature of motherhood?

A Life of Self-Gift

*Relationships are known through the phenomenological description of action that leads to being. The method of procreation expressively presents motherhood as a relationship different from fatherhood... A woman gives herself, but without going out of herself, by accepting within herself.*¹⁷⁵

Mary is the perfect exemplar of discipleship for all humanity, man and woman alike.¹⁷⁶ She is both a preeminent member of the Church as well as the ideal “exemplary realization” of the Church.¹⁷⁷ As one reads in *Lumen Gentium*: “In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷¹ Lk 1:38.

¹⁷² GS, 24. See also, Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 80.

¹⁷³ MD, 7. This notion of complete openness to motherhood is mentioned as the ideal. It is not unknown that, for many reasons, many women today are not open to the gift of life.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 52-55.

¹⁷⁵ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 80.

¹⁷⁶ CCC 967. For more, see, Nichols, “The Divine Motherhood, 24; and, Chloe Breyer, “A Meditation on Mary, Mother of God”, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 42, no. 2 (2003): 140.

¹⁷⁷ CCC 967.

¹⁷⁸ LG 61. See also, Megan McKenna, *Mary, Shadow of Grace* (New York: Oebis Books, 1995), 28-30.

The exemplary nature of the person of Mary means that she is more than just a woman who lived once thousands of years ago, “her role in relation to the Church and to all humanity goes still further.”¹⁷⁹ In calling Mary “mother” one acknowledges that she is Mother of Christ, and the mother of those her Son entrusted to her while He hung on the cross - His Body here on earth.¹⁸⁰ As a result of this mission, Mary became the “woman” - the New Eve - and the Mother of the whole Christ – the mother of all the living.¹⁸¹

Mary’s life is her own, but it is for Another, and because of Him, it is also for all others. Mary is the handmaid of the Lord, the form of “help” that God described woman as in Genesis. This spiritual attitude that Mary embodies is one characterised by selfless love and is more commonly termed “motherhood.”¹⁸² Mary is first and foremost the help of her Son.¹⁸³ Saint Edith Stein makes the important point of noting that, as the handmaid of the Lord, that which Mary does is alone that which God called her to do.¹⁸⁴ Another way of stating this would be to say that she is living in full accord with her God-given nature and vocation.¹⁸⁵

As briefly touched on in the prior chapter, Saint Edith Stein determines motherhood to be the vocation of woman.¹⁸⁶ The nature of this vocation is twofold: the natural vocation of woman to be a spouse and a mother.¹⁸⁷ Far from the notion that to dedicate one’s life to being a spouse and a mother impedes a woman from realising her “dreams,” living out her natural vocation is the means by which woman comes to self-

¹⁷⁹ *MD*, 10.

¹⁸⁰ Jn 19:26-27. See also: Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:16-17; 12:12-27;

LG, 62; and CCC 968.

¹⁸¹ *LG*, 61. See also, Nichols, “The Divine Motherhood, 25., and, McKenna, *Mary, Shadow of Grace*, 28. Barker, “Mary’s Motherhood Matters Most,” 34.

¹⁸² Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 338; Harrington and Cervantes, “Woman,” 819.

¹⁸³ CCC 964-65. She assents to conceiving Him in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:26-38.); she watches over Him and cares for Him as a child (Mt 2:13; Lk 2:40; 42-45.); she supports Him during His ministry (Mt 12:46; Mk 3:31; Lk 8:19; Jn 2:1-12.); she accompanies Him on His most painful journey to Calvary; she is there at the height of His suffering on the cross (Lk 2:35.); she holds the crucified body of her Son in her arms (Jn 19:25); she continues His mission after His resurrection and ascension (Cf. Act 1:14; 12:12. See also *LG*, 59, 69).

¹⁸⁴ Stein, *Woman*, 192; Brenda Finlayson, “Guardians of Spousal and Maternal Love,” in *Woman and Man*, ed. The Pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), 390. For a contrary interpretation, see, Esther Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible,” 467. For the rest of the examples she provides, see pages 466-468.

¹⁸⁵ Stein, *Woman*, 192.

¹⁸⁶ See *ibid*, 45.

¹⁸⁷ Saint Edith Stein’s *Essays on Woman*, have this notion as their underlying principle of their discussions on all matters pertaining the nature and vocation of motherhood. For an explicit example, see, *ibid*.

realisation.¹⁸⁸ To be a wife fits into woman's natural disposition to be loved and to love, to care for and safeguard life.¹⁸⁹ To no higher or lesser degree, but in a different way, this capacity is more clearly seen in her vocation to motherhood.¹⁹⁰

Saint Edith Stein defines how exactly woman can come to fulfill this mission accorded to her by nature and grace. This will be looked at in the following chapter. For now this thesis simply wants to state that Mary reveals to all women that the fullness of their femininity lies in their inherent vocations to be wife and mother. She is able to reveal such and reveals such most fully because of the subject of her motherhood – Christ. And so this thesis now turns to Him in order to ascertain what Christ, the *imago Dei*, reveals about who woman is and what her vocation to motherhood is.

2.4. The Fruit of Her Womb, Jesus, and the Light He Sheds on Motherhood

*At all times Christ is aware of being “the servant of the Lord” according to the prophecy of Isaiah ... which includes the essential content of his messianic mission, namely, his awareness of being the Redeemer of the world. From the first moment of her divine motherhood, of her union with the Son whom “the Father sent into the world, that the world might be saved through him” (cf. Jn 3:17), Mary takes her place within Christ's messianic service. It is precisely this service which constitutes the very foundation of that Kingdom in which “to serve ... means to reign”. Christ, the “Servant of the Lord”, will show all people the royal dignity of service, the dignity which is joined in the closest possible way to the vocation of every person.*¹⁹¹

“God has given me a son,” cries Eve as her first child, Cain, is born into the world.¹⁹² Her cry of praise reveals an awareness of the blessing that she has been given in the new life of her son.¹⁹³ After her, it seems to be the case that the women of Israel likewise saw their feminine vocation in this manner: “to bring forth offspring who were to see the day of salvation.”¹⁹⁴ In this sense, Saint Edith Stein offers that the *Protoevangelium* does not just speak of Mary and Eve, but that all of Eve's successors/Mary's predecessors.¹⁹⁵ The link between the Fall and Redemption hence

¹⁸⁸ This notion will be addressed more particularly in the following chapter.

¹⁸⁹ Fastiggi, “Mary: Exemplar of Faithful Love for Virgins, Spouses, Mothers, and the Church,” 348. Refer back to earlier chapter, 1.3.3.

¹⁹⁰ Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 338.

¹⁹¹ *MD*, 5.

¹⁹² Gn 4:1.

¹⁹³ Stein, *Woman*, 63.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 62-63, 188; Esther Fuchs, “Moses / Jesus / Women: Does the New Testament Offer a Feminist Message?,” *Cross Currents* 49, no. 4 (1999/2000): 467.

¹⁹⁵ Dr. L Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, OCD, “Editor's Introduction,” in *The Collected Works of Edith Stein*, ed. Dr. L Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, OCD, (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications), 63.

extends across all generations leading up to the birth of Christ. Eve's great joy and awe as expressed by the exclamation: "I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord," is thus echoed each and every time a new person is born into the world and was proclaimed most truly when Christ was born into the world. Indeed, this link between Eve and the women of Israel also affirms the universality of the feminine vocation to motherhood.

From the foretelling of redemption in Genesis 3:15, one is able to move to the Redeemer Himself - "the seed" as revealed in the Gospels. Whilst having chronologically discussed Eve and Mary before Christ in this thesis, it is Christ who, through His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, ultimately reveals humanity to itself.¹⁹⁶ Through the Paschal Mystery, the sin which entered the world at the Fall, is defeated once and for all,¹⁹⁷ and that obscurity and diminishment that shrouded the *imago Dei* in humanity has been lifted.¹⁹⁸ This means that the nature of woman and her vocation to motherhood, which was also obscured and diminished by the Fall, must be looked at in the light of Christ in order to be understood without any obscurity.¹⁹⁹ In Him, one is also able to see what this reality of the redemption means for the dignity and vocation of woman.²⁰⁰

It is possible to identify the dignity of woman when looking closely at Christ's entire disposition towards the human person and, in particular, His disposition towards women. This attitude that Christ has towards women is, "an attitude which is extremely simple, and for this reason very extraordinary, if seen against the background of His time."²⁰¹ Saint John Paul II then specifies that this attitude is one marked by great clarity as well as great depth.²⁰² The clarity and depth he seems to be referring to here is the clear and profound light Christ sheds on the dignity and vocation of woman. Each encounter Christ has with women in the New Testament is characterised by an

¹⁹⁶ *GS*, 22. As referenced in: *MD*, 11; Allen, "Mulieris Dignitatem Twenty Years Later: An Overview of the Document and Challenges," 26.

¹⁹⁷ For the nature of the evil which Christ came to redeem humanity from, see, Gerald O'Collins, *Christology. A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 298.

¹⁹⁸ 1 Cor 13:12.

¹⁹⁹ Lk 8:17. Cf. Mt 10:26; Rom 16:25-27; Col 1:13-27. Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries. His Place in the History of Culture*. 299. Cf. Job 3:19; Is 45:13; Jn 8:32-36; Acts 13:39; Rom 8:2, 21; 1 Cor 7:21-22; Gal 4:31; Col 3:11; etc.

²⁰⁰ *MD*, 13.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 12.

²⁰² *Ibid*.

affirmation of the value that is innate to every woman and that is elevated in the “newness of life” brought into fruition through Christ.²⁰³

2.4.1. Christ as Son, Mary as Mother

The Making of the New Covenant

The dignity of woman as revealed by Christ is primarily and most fully evident in the first and most intimate relationship He has with a human person – His mother, Mary. Saint John Paul II acknowledges that it difficult to grasp why the words of the *Protoevangelium* place such great emphasis on the “woman”, “if it is not admitted that in her the new and definitive Covenant of God with humanity has its beginning, the Covenant in the redeeming blood of Christ.”²⁰⁴ The New and everlasting Covenant that is to be established by Christ begins with a woman, the “woman,” who is revealed to be Mary at the Annunciation of Nazareth. The fact that the woman - Mary - is chosen to make His Covenant with humanity, is an affirmation of her feminine dignity and vocation.²⁰⁵

Throughout the Old Testament, God makes His Covenant with His chosen people by addressing Himself to men – Abraham, Noah, and Moses.²⁰⁶ Perhaps such is an example of the consequences of the Fall in action.²⁰⁷ It is the men who rule over the women, and so God addresses Himself to the rulers of His people in order to establish His Covenant. Of course, God could have chosen to upheave cultural norms and establish His covenant with the likes of Sarah, Rebekah, Miriam, or whomever.²⁰⁸ But He did not. One could speculate about why God chose to establish His Covenant only with men, and there could even possibly be some merits in the endeavour. Nonetheless, no measure of research would change the simple fact that establishing His Covenants

²⁰³ Ibid. (This section will glance at a few of these encounters, namely those that are looked at most in *Mulieris Dignitatem*.)

²⁰⁴ MD, 11. To offer a very concise definition of ‘covenant,’ one can turn to R. H. Jarrell who defines the Scriptural concept of “covenant” as: “The dominant ideology describing God’s relationship to humanity” (R. H. Jarrell, “The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 3, no. 18 (2002): 4).

²⁰⁵ MD, 11.

²⁰⁶ Gn 9:1-17; 15; Ex 24. See also *ibid*.

²⁰⁷ This is not a forgone conclusion but is perceived by some. For example, see, Jarrell, “The Birth Narrative as Female Counterpart to Covenant,” 2.

²⁰⁸ CCC 489. Even with this tradition of discrimination and this tendency towards unjust inequality, the women of the Old Covenant prepared for the particular mission of the woman Mary. Refer to Christ’s genealogy in the opening of Matthew’s Gospel to see the names of a few of the key female figures who played crucial roles in the history of Israel.

with men is what God saw most fitting to do. Because God traditionally chose to make His covenants with men, His addressing Himself to Mary reveals a sense of profound newness and difference. Something vastly different is happening here, something that has not yet happened before.²⁰⁹

“At the beginning of the New Covenant, which is to be eternal and irrevocable, there is a woman: the Virgin of Nazareth.”²¹⁰ Saint John Paul II speaks of this as indicative of the truth Saint Paul declared of their being neither male nor female in Christ.²¹¹ In other words, in Christ, that age-old opposition that has existed between man and woman, that tendency for man to lord over woman, and for their relationship to be marked by inequality, is essentially surmounted and returned to its original state.²¹² In this sense, even before Christ was born, the nature of His redemptive work is evident and in effect.

The crux of the New Covenant lies in the glorious event of the Son of God Himself becoming human.²¹³ In doing so, God not only condescends to the level of His creatures,²¹⁴ but He also deifies the human being when He takes on the flesh of humanity and unites it to His glory.²¹⁵ As aforementioned, it is as a true man that the Son of God is conceived, born, performs all of His miracles and ministry, is crucified, and is resurrected. He hence accomplishes humanity’s redemption as a human being. In doing so, He thus shows humanity the splendid way it was made to live and be. “In this way,” as the Second Vatican Council teaches, “he fully reveals man to himself and makes man’s supreme calling clear.”²¹⁶ Christ is thus the ultimate aid and indeed the means of humanity’s self-discovery.²¹⁷ God is redeeming humanity, and the first glimpse one catches of this glorious work, is His hailing the dignity of woman and the intrinsic worth of her vocation to motherhood.

²⁰⁹ *MD*, 11.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Gal 3:28. See, Fitzmyer, “The Letter to the Galatians.” In *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 787. Cf. Joel 2:29; Jn 17:11; Rom 3:22, 29; Cor 7:19; Gal 3:26.

²¹² Gal 3:28.

²¹³ 1 Cor 15:14-15

²¹⁴ Phil 2:8. Cf. 2 Cor 8:9.

²¹⁵ Cf. Jn 11:40; Rom 6:4, 8; 8:11; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 2:12, 13; Eph 2:6.

²¹⁶ *GS*, 22. See also Heb 4:15.

²¹⁷ Cf. Ps 8:5.

The genealogy of Christ as found in the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel likewise affirms the unique and definitive womanhood of Mary in salvation history.²¹⁸ In reading through the genealogy, one hears of, "Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar,"²¹⁹ and, "Salmon the father of Bo'az by Rahab, and Bo'az the father of Obed by Ruth,"²²⁰ and that, "David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Ur'iah."²²¹ All the women listed are listed for their roles as mothers.²²² These are some of the women who played a great role in the life of Israel by their deeds, but ultimately they are recorded here because of their role in the fulfillment of God's plan to send His Son to restore humanity to Himself and likewise restore the *imago Dei*.

There is, nonetheless, one more figure mentioned in the Matthew's genealogy of Christ, the final woman - Mary. All the women mentioned so far in the genealogy have been spoken of secondarily.²²³ The fact that they are mentioned should not be overlooked. Neither should the fact that they are mentioned specifically in relation to their vocation as mother be belittled. Yet, their mention is markedly different to that of Mary. When the genealogy climactically arrives at the parents of Christ, one reads, "and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."²²⁴ Not only is the New Covenant marked as exceptional due to its being made with a woman as the representative for humanity, the Kingdom of God, made immanent through this New Covenant, also sees the role of humanity, as male and female, changed.²²⁵ Now the definitive relationship of the Covenant is that of mother and Son.²²⁶ The eternal Word, the Son of God takes on flesh through a human mother, but not through a human father.²²⁷

Due to the new Covenant being formed in this maternal relationship, between Mary and the Son of God, Saint Edith Stein moves to ask, "Can we not find here an

²¹⁸ When speaking on the role of Mary "the Blessed Mother" in the economy of salvation, *Lumen Gentium* provides a brief Old Testament overview of some of the involvement of women in the history of Israel. (*LG*, 55.)

²¹⁹ Mt 1:3.

²²⁰ Mt 1:5.

²²¹ Mt 1:6.

²²² See, Viviano, "The Gospel According to Matthew, 634.

²²³ "Judah the father of Perez and Zerah," and how did they come into the world? "By Tamar."

²²⁴ Mt 1:16. "This voice is carefully constructed to avoid saying that Jesus was the son of Joseph" (*Ibid*, 635).

²²⁵ *MD*, 11.

²²⁶ Stein, *Woman*, 63.

²²⁷ This is not to abolish the necessary unity between man and woman, for such would be counter to all of the New Testament, not to mention counter to humanity's own nature, which, as aforementioned, grace does not do away with, but perfects.

indication that there is a flaw inherent in this fashion of procreation from the first sin, which can only be redeemed *by* the kingdom of grace?”²²⁸ Following on from this statement, she then continues to rhetorically ask a question that would perhaps now be the source of debate: “Does it not indicate the nobility of motherhood as the purest and most elevated union of human beings?”²²⁹ She thus distinguishes that the differentiation of woman and man as revealed in the work of redemption is that, “a woman was *the* person who was permitted to help establish God's new kingdom,” and, “that redemption came through the Son of Man, the new Adam.”²³⁰ The relationship of Mary and Christ thus shines forth as the union of male and female mutuality and collaboration that God had intended in the beginning.

The Visitation

Mary was chosen as the Mother of God due to her being full of grace.²³¹ In recalling Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary - “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you” - one is informed of why this was so.²³² Mary is full of grace because of her oneness with God.²³³ Being immaculately conceived, and so without sin, this oneness would have been something that she had known/come to have known from her birth.²³⁴ Yet, this union with God was made even more profound and even more intimate, upon her *fiat*, when Christ physically became one with her. The greeting of Elizabeth calls to mind a common appellation for pregnancy, when people say, “she is with child.” While Mary is with child, and this child is her Lord and Saviour, the reversal of this statement proves the Messianic title, Emmanuel – God with us. Emphasis is thus placed, not on Mary as mother, but on the one conceived within her womb - Christ.²³⁵

This emphasis also speaks about the Christian concept of motherhood. Although to say that someone is “with child,” may be a reference that is somewhat outdated and so has since been replaced by other language, it can still be noted that this reference places

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Kathleen Curran Sweeney highlights the profound significance which motherhood has in the New Covenant. See, Sweeney, “The Perfection of Women as Maternal and the Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła, 150.

²³⁰ Stein, *Woman*, 63.

²³¹ Refer back to the first section of this chapter.

²³² Lk 1:28.

²³³ *MD*, 3, 4, 5.

²³⁴ CCC 491.

²³⁵ Is 7:14; Mt 1:23.

all the focus and attention on the person of the mother. Such appears to be especially emphasised today.²³⁶ Not uncommonly, an unbalanced weight given to the individual woman over her child can be so extreme that it reckons womanhood and motherhood as two, not entirely separate, but certainly dissonant realities.²³⁷ This notion will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter, but it is of importance to also mention it here in this context of Mary and her Son. For, contrary to what was just stated, the hail of Elizabeth points to the child conceived as the focus.

In this way, Christ seems to be shedding greater light on the true Christian concept of motherhood. Mary is hailed for her being full of grace, but also for her being with child. Instead of referring to Mary as being “with child,” Elizabeth emphasises that the child is with her. Through Elizabeth’s hail, Christ seems to be revealing that the redeemed vocation of motherhood is characterised by the selfless love of the mother for her child. For the woman, having a child no longer becomes about “me,” but about “you.”²³⁸ Giulia Paola Di Nicola and Danese Attilio also propound: “The maternal physiological factor is an invitation to restrain selfishness, individualism, the making of unfulfilled promises and the delusion of the omnipotence of the I.”²³⁹ Again, this is not to assert that, in becoming with child the mother loses her personhood and her identity as a woman. Keeping what has earlier been said about the original intention of God for humanity to discover himself through the complete gift of his own person, it follows that, in giving herself completely to her child, the mother actually finds her fulfillment as a woman.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ *LW*, 2.

²³⁷ I.e., Oh, “Motherhood in Christianity and Islam: Critiques, Realities, and Possibilities,” 639.

²³⁸ To the characteristic of “selflessness,” Josef Pieper also describes the love of a mother as “unconditional.” See, Joseph Pieper, “Love,” in *Faith. Hope. Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 273). Cf. Ex 34:6; Ps 52:1,8; Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8; 8:31-39; Eph 2:4-7; 3:17-19; 1 Jn 4:9,10,16,19; etc. See also, Sabin, “Becoming Christ: The Vocation of Women in Theology and Scripture,” 156.

²³⁹ Danese and Di Nicola, “Woman and Man: Created One for the Other,” 105.

²⁴⁰ Pieper “Love,” 273.

2.4.2. *Christ Reveals Woman to Humanity*

*“In all of Jesus' teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women prevalent in his day. On the contrary, his words and works always express the respect and honour due to women.”*²⁴¹

Through Mary, one can see that the particular service of Christ towards women is evident, so to speak, right from the get go. Such is revealed not just through the greeting of Elizabeth at the Visitation and what it entails, but also through the fact that it was Mary whom God chose to establish His New and everlasting Covenant with. As aforementioned, a heavily patriarchal tradition was broken when God revealed Himself, not to a man, but to Mary in order to establish His New Covenant. This was not a break made for the sake of being counter-cultural, or for the sake of creating a sense of shock and scandal, an interpretation sometimes inferred upon the actions of Christ these days. Nor is it a break for the sake of establishing something new, something uniquely “Christ”, so as to make His “mark”, as one often sees contemporary politicians and other leaders doing. In fact, when Christ acts in ways that seem to contradict tradition, He is not breaking tradition at all, but restoring it to what it ought to be. He did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it,²⁴² and to return humanity to the heart of the law which was obscured and diminished at the Fall.²⁴³

Christ accomplishes the redemption of the Law through His peeling back the squalid layers of bureaucracy, pretention, and pernickety, that had accumulated over the years and had so come to obscure the true heart of the Law.²⁴⁴ The lawyer of Luke 10 who, as a devout student of the Law should have understood the Law better than others, proved that he knew it in words, but not in heart.²⁴⁵ In vain efforts to justify himself, the Lawyer asks Christ, “And who is my neighbour?”²⁴⁶ The words and actions of Christ’s life provide an answer of greater depth and profundity than the parable of the Good Samaritan can portray. Christ’s person testifies that your neighbour is every man, as well as every woman.

²⁴¹ *MD*, 13.

²⁴² Mt 5:17. Cf. Rom 10:3-5. Cf. Rom 3:31. See also, Viviano, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” 640.

²⁴³ See also, *ibid*, 641.

²⁴⁴ For a few of many examples, turn to Matthew 12.

²⁴⁵ Lk 10:25-27. Cf. Deut 6:4-5; Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:30, 31, 33, 24; Js 2:8.

²⁴⁶ Lk 10:29.

Some write off the actions of Christ in the Gospels as simply affirmations of unjust patriarchy.²⁴⁷ However, when looking at the figure of Christ, whether through the eyes of faith or through the eyes of skepticism, it is generally held that He was an ambassador for the true dignity of woman and of her corresponding vocation to motherhood.²⁴⁸ The Gospels are filled with instances of Christ encountering different women in various circumstances, many of which were circumstances that essentially epitomised what was deemed to be socially unacceptable at that time.²⁴⁹ It is for this reason of Christ's unconditional care for woman and upholding of her dignity that He was often the attention of disrepute and scandal.²⁵⁰ Even Christ's own disciples were at times shocked by His unconventional treatment of women.²⁵¹

In *MD*, Saint John Paul II spends a significant amount of time listing examples of Gospel narratives and parables that reveal Christ's treatment of women with honour and dignity.²⁵² One notable instance of such a nature is that of Christ healing a woman who had suffered from a severe stoop for eighteen years. Christ healing on the Sabbath seems to be the focus and source of controversy here, but it is not the only break from tradition. In His response to the synagogue ruler, Christ now refers to the woman, not just as "woman," but as "a daughter of Abraham." Saint John Paul II makes a note that this reference is usually one reserved for men - "a son of Abraham."²⁵³ This is the only time that this title is used in reference to a female.²⁵⁴ In this sense, one is again reminded of God's revelation of His New Covenant to Mary, an affirmation and restoration of the dignity and vocation of woman.

This new treatment of women as having equal status with men in the New Covenant is also seen during Christ's walk to Calvary when He refers to the women weeping for Him as "Daughters of Jerusalem."²⁵⁵ In the words of Saint John Paul II, "This way of speaking to and about women, as well as his manner of treating them, clearly

²⁴⁷ For example, see, Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," 463-64.

²⁴⁸ *MD*, 12.

²⁴⁹ For a few pertinent examples, turn to the fifth chapter of *MD – JESUS CHRIST*.

²⁵⁰ *MD*, 12-16.

²⁵¹ Jn 4:27.

²⁵² See *MD*, V – Jesus Christ.

²⁵³ *MD*, 13.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵⁵ Lk 23:28. Note here that the term "status" is used in relation to dignity and worth, not social rankings or classifications.

constitutes an ‘innovation’ with respect to the prevailing custom at that time.”²⁵⁶ The woman with the stoop is no longer forced by her physical ailments to face the ground. Christ heals her, enabling her to stand tall. By calling her “Daughter of Jerusalem,” Christ also heals her of crippling social prejudices. He proves to the synagogue ruler, the onlookers, and the woman, her true and property dignity as a human person and, more particularly, as a woman.

All of Christ’s encounters with women in the Gospels testify to the Psalmists cry, “O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me!”²⁵⁷ When He looks at humanity, Christ sees beyond the imperfect facades of tradition. Christ, the eternal Word, thus “knows what is in Man,” the eternal truth of the human being’s dignity, which He Himself created and redeemed.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, Christ Himself is in fact the definitive confirmation of and testimony to this worth.²⁵⁹ Through calling the woman with the stoop “Daughter of Abraham,” and the weeping women, “Daughters of Jerusalem,” Christ vocally affirms the dignity of these women and thus of all women. He is the voice of God in Genesis who beholds His creation and affirms it as “very good.”²⁶⁰ Their personhood, their womanhood, is something inherited from the beginning, an inheritance that is then restored in Christ. As Saint John Paul II writes, “Jesus of Nazareth confirms this dignity, recalls it, renews it, and makes it a part of the Gospel and of the Redemption for which he is sent into the world.”²⁶¹

One can clearly see through the words and actions of Christ that, in every way, He was and is intimately familiar with “the mysteries of the Kingdom.”²⁶² As the Kingdom of God is comprised of people, both men and women, Christ is thus also intimately familiar with humanity as a whole. This familiarity hence includes masculinity and femininity and their differing qualities, as well as the individual nature of each person.²⁶³ Saint John Paul II goes on to say that this intimate familiarity with humanity

²⁵⁶ *MD*, 13.

²⁵⁷ Ps 139:1.

²⁵⁸ Jn 2:25. Such is not only evident in Christ’s interactions with women but is affirmed by the poetical prelude to Saint John’s Gospel (Jn 1:1-4, 10-14). *MD*, 13. Cf. Eph 1:1-5. See also, Karris, “The Gospel According to Luke”, 705.

²⁵⁹ *MD*, 12.

²⁶⁰ Gn 1:31. Cf. The instance of the sinful woman in Lk 7:39.

²⁶¹ *MD*, 14. For an interjection that the Gospels do not support the notion of Christ as the liberator of woman, see, Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible,” 464.

²⁶² Jn 2:25. See also *MD*, 12.

²⁶³ Rom 12:4, 5; 1 Cor 12:12-20.

proves that Christ was, and is, also “a witness of God’s eternal plan for the human being” who was created in His own image and likeness.²⁶⁴

Even though He was like humanity in everything but sin, Christ was also completely aware of sin and its consequences, “Of that ‘mystery of iniquity’ working in human hearts as the bitter fruit of the obscuring of the divine image.”²⁶⁵ In order to illustrate this aspect of Christ’s divine knowledge, Saint John Paul II turns to the Gospel narrative where the Pharisees ask Christ about divorce. He begins by making a point of noting that, “It is truly significant that in his important discussion about marriage and its indissolubility, in the presence of “the Scribes”, who by profession were experts in the Law, Jesus *makes reference to the “beginning.”*²⁶⁶ The question asked is posed as one concerned with a man’s rights to divorce his wife for whatever he may deem to be a fit reason for leaving her. Divorcing a woman was to essentially leave her alone, without protection, without shelter, and without a source of sustenance.²⁶⁷ What Christ then makes apparent to the Pharisees is that the question asked also concerns the rights and dignity of the woman.

Christ turns the Pharisees’ point of reference to the beginning in which such was not the case. What was not so? The image of God being obscured and diminished is what was not so. And, as evident in the Pharisees’ questioning, Christ is referring in particular to the obscuring of woman’s dignity that sees man tending to dominate over her. It is for this reason that Christ appeals to the beginning, where God revealed that humanity was intentionally created by God, in His own image and likeness, as male and female.²⁶⁸ In the beginning, humanity was fully in the image and likeness of God, unobscured and undiminished, and where the relationship between man and woman was characterised by selfless love. Even though such was not the case at the time of this discussion, Christ knows that this is the divine will of the Father and remains the inherent worth of each person, including women who, at this time, were often the unjust victims of divorce.

²⁶⁴ *MD*, 12.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Mt 19:3. For more on the nature of divorce at this time, see, Dunning, “Virgin Earth. Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons,” 61-62.

²⁶⁸ Refer back to previous chapter, 2.2.2.

In *MD*, Saint John Paul II further moves to make the observation that, “*Christ’s way of acting, the Gospel of His words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women.*”²⁶⁹ Christ takes on flesh, entering into the time and world of humanity. In doing so, He steps into a world marred and oppressed, obscured and diminished by the inheritance of sin.²⁷⁰ A particularly obvious and harmful way in which this inheritance is expressed is the inveterate inequity against women in favour of men. This inheritance of sin is not found only in men but had, and still has, its roots in the attitudes and actions of women.²⁷¹

Of all of the instances found in the Gospels of Christ relating to women, *MD* pays most heed to that of the woman caught in adultery.²⁷² This incident is particularly worth noting for from it Saint John Paul II draws parallels between this injustice of inequality and incidents of injustice against motherhood. The woman caught in adultery, he proposes, is just an instance of the countless times in every period of history, where women unjustly cop the blame and responsibility for things which both man and woman are rightly culpable.²⁷³ When God confronted Adam and Eve with their choice of non-likeness, it was Adam who, instead of honest repentance, jumped in to accuse, saying, “The woman...she gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate.”²⁷⁴ In relation to the woman accused of adultery, Saint John Paul II writes: “Sometimes, forgetting his own sin,” the man/men involved, “even makes himself the accuser, as in the case described.”²⁷⁵

To the woman caught in adultery, Christ incites in the men who accuse her, and desire to stone her, a consciousness of their own sin.²⁷⁶ In doing so, He reveals His divine capacity to see the heart of humanity as well the profound truth of His love which perceives the sinfulness of a person separately to their innate personal dignity. Thereby, in just exhortation, “Jesus seems to say to the accusers: Is not this woman, for all her sin, above all a confirmation of your own transgressions, of your “male”

²⁶⁹ *MD*, 12.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*.

²⁷² Jn 8:3-11. See, Viviano, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” 642.

²⁷³ *MD*, 14.

²⁷⁴ Gn 3:12.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 13, 14.

²⁷⁶ Jn 8:4-9.

injustice, your misdeeds?”²⁷⁷ Through this narrative, Christ thus reveals that sin and sex are not factors barring any power to alter the innate worth of the human person.²⁷⁸

In His treatment of the situation of the woman caught in adultery, Christ once again reveals His selfless service to the dignity of the human person.²⁷⁹ It is perhaps for this reason that many of the narratives found in the Gospels are based around the interactions of Christ with those who have been done a disservice by society.²⁸⁰ Women are certainly included in this category, as can be seen by the examples given above, which are just some of many such narratives in the Gospels.

Thus, the fulfillment of the Law is linked to the “unveiling” of the human person. Christ as the “Unveiler” reveals the nature of woman as inherently good and as being of equal status with men in His Heavenly Kingdom. Christ does not do this as an explicit act of social reform. Indeed, His unveiling of the *imago Dei* in woman seems to be an act that takes place first and foremost on a personal level, to different women in the Gospel. In this sense, as will be seen in the following section, Christ cannot only be seen as the revealer of humanity to itself but, on a more intimate level, He is seen to reveal the individual person to themselves. In doing so, He reveals the nature of His mission, yes to save humanity as a whole, but more so to raise each individual to the original goodness and worth that the Creator had intended from the beginning. For woman, this entails a restoration of her dignity and an affirmation of the goodness of her femininity.

2.4.3. Christ Reveals Woman to Herself

*They feel “liberated” by this truth, restored to themselves: they feel loved with “eternal love”, with a love which finds direct expression in Christ himself.*²⁸¹

Christ is at the service of revealing the dignity of woman and her innate vocation, not just to society, but also to herself.²⁸² Saint John Paul II notes that this self-realisation

²⁷⁷ *MD*, 14.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Eccl 7:20; Rom 3:9, 22-24; Gal 3:22; 1 Jn 1:8-10.

²⁷⁹ Pheme Perkins, “The Gospel According to John,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. S.S. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1990), 964.

²⁸⁰ For a few examples, see: Mt 8:3-3; 11:5; 12:13; Mk 1:41; 5:41; Lk 5:13; Jn 4:9-10.

²⁸¹ *MD*, 15.

²⁸² O’Collins, *Christology. A biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus*, 297.

can be most clearly seen in the women who surrounded Christ. The life of Christ is said to be characterised by the custom of having women among His close companions, as well as His showing equal concern with the redemption and dignity of woman as with the redemption and dignity of man.²⁸³ Their proximity to the Redeemer, as well as to that which He teaches and does, is the source of their self-discovery. Christ treats all with the worth that their God-given nature, if not demands, then at least deserves, and most definitely yearns for.²⁸⁴ Hence, in their closeness to Christ, they find that who they are as women is transformed.²⁸⁵

Through His treatment of woman with the dignity and worth owing to them, Christ thus confirms the truth and precept of this “ethos”, which one sees apparent in the beginning as a fundamental aspect of creation.²⁸⁶ The mistreatment of women and the discrimination against them had come to guise themselves under the veneer of “tradition.” All of these traditions that were underpinned to some degree or another by misogyny, stemmed from the Fall. The Israelites played their part in redemption by actively awaiting the Messiah through their adherence to the Law. Yet this sincere intent to live faithfully as God’s chosen people was not void of the inequality between men and women that resulted from the Fall.²⁸⁷

Whilst the Old Covenant saw the Israelites trying to maintain relationship with God through faithfully following the Law, the New Covenant reveals that the human person instead fulfils their own share of the labour of redemption through intimacy with Christ.²⁸⁸ With this understanding, men and women both equally find and fully realise their redemption through personal relationship with the person of Christ. One can rightly thus conclude that redemption admits no difference between man and woman. For the salvation of each, as well as their union with each other, is dependent on the same individual and intimate union with Christ.²⁸⁹ One may then ask why there are

²⁸³ Dunning, “Virgin Earth. Virgin Birth: Creation, Sexual Difference, and Recapitulation in Irenaeus of Lyons”, 62.

²⁸⁴ *MD*, 15.

²⁸⁵ Stein, *Woman*, 77-78.

²⁸⁶ *MD*, 15. Gn 1 and 2. Cf. 1 Cor 13. See also, Little, *The Church and the Culture War. Secular Anarchy or Sacred Order*, 126.

²⁸⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 75.

²⁸⁸ Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” *Image of God He Created Them; Male and Female He Created Them*: Person, Nature, and Culture,” 80.

²⁸⁹ Allen, “*Mulieris Dignitatem* Twenty Years Later: An Overview of the Document and Challenges,” 26.

still varying degrees of inequality evident in the redeemed Body of Christ – the Church. In short, the answer is sin.²⁹⁰ Christ’s victory over sin does not change the fact that humanity still allows sin to diminish and obscure the image and likeness of God in themselves.²⁹¹

Among other things, the evidence of the obscurity and diminishment of the image and likeness of God in humanity due to sin is also apparent in the countless varying attitudes towards motherhood today. Surely, if the *imago Dei* in humanity was clear, then so too would be the image of woman and the nature of her vocation. Yet, it is readily seen that, surrounding these essential questions concerning the human person, where there is sin, there is still an abundance of obscurity. What Saint Edith Stein observes in the relationships between men and women in the 1920s/30s, is as true now as it was then:

Everywhere about us, we see in the interaction of the sexes the direct fruits of original sin in most terrifying forms: an unleashed sexual life in which every trace of their high calling seems to be lost; a struggle between the sexes, one pitted against the other, as they fight for their rights and, in doing so, no longer appear to hear the voices of nature and of God.²⁹²

In order to gain some form of image of this redemptive work of Christ as manifest in woman, Saint Edith Stein also turns to Mary and her relationship with Christ. Going back to the first evidence of this redemptive and divine relationship, Saint Edith Stein speaks of Mary’s role in the *Protoevangelium* as an expression of the natural characteristics of woman. The aspects of femininity that are revealed in the role “the woman” is the burden for the correct growth and development of every person as well as a keen moral sensitivity that both seeks to uphold the highest of values and that naturally detests anything that is less.²⁹³ Although not exclusive to motherhood, one can see that both of these characteristics are essential to motherhood and, find their fullest expressions and ennoblement in the motherhood of Mary.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ Gn 4:7; Rom 6:12, 16; 7:23-24; 6:14; 8:11, 13; 1 Cor 15:53, 54; 2 Cor 4:111.

²⁹¹ Stein, *Woman*, 75.

²⁹² Fuchs, *The literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexial Politics in the Hebrew Bible*, 471.

²⁹³ Stein, *Woman*, 63. See also, 77.

²⁹⁴ *MD*, 5; Marie Noonan Sabin, “Becoming Christ: The Vocation of Women in Theology and Scripture,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74 (2009); Stein, *Woman*, 77-78.

Christ thus ultimately affirms the dignity of woman and the vocation of motherhood through His closeness to His mother, Mary.²⁹⁵ It is for this reason that Saint Edith Stein refers to Mary as “queen of all women.”²⁹⁶ Christ also implicitly affirms the vocation of motherhood through the maternal nature of His body – the Church. Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realisation of the Church.²⁹⁷ In this sense the Church mirrors her own mother, Mary, turning to her in order to understand her own vocation as mother to all. *Lumen Gentium* puts it clearly when it states:

The Church indeed... by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse.²⁹⁸

Tina Beattie holds that such analogies between the Church and woman in relation to God, or between humanity and woman in relation to God, are often more harmful than not, perpetuating that “Eve image” of woman.²⁹⁹ The female person, in particular, the female body always represent the lesser, the male person and the male body always representing the greater. The flaws of such analogies, she posits, are particularly harmful when metaphorically speaking of woman as humanity, fallen and broken in relation to the masculine God – the Son of God and His Father.³⁰⁰

Whilst to some extent, such may have been true in terms of past theological treatments of woman, especially in relation to the figures of Mary and Eve, one can see that this is clearly not the case for Christ.³⁰¹ Christ upholds woman as distinct and separate from man in her nature and vocation, but equal to him in terms of worth and the proper treatment owing to her. This is readily evident in the fact that Christ did not just establish the new and everlasting Covenant with a woman, but through the vocation of motherhood. In this sense, Christ did not just ennoble woman, raising her to the same status that men had traditionally held as the representatives of humanity in the establishment of God’s Covenant, but He did so through something that is distinctly

²⁹⁵ Sabin, “Becoming Christ: The Vocation of Women in Theology and Scripture,” 156.

²⁹⁶ Stein, *Woman*, 78.

²⁹⁷ CCC 507.

²⁹⁸ *LG*, 64. Cf. *LG*, 63. For more on the Scriptural meaning of the term “virgin” see, McKenna, *Mary, Shadow of Grace*. For alternate interpretations, see, Fuchs, “The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible,” 463-64.

²⁹⁹ Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 172.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 173. This can also be seen in, McKenna, *Mary, Shadow of Grace*, 27-28.

³⁰¹ *MD*, 12.

and exclusively feminine. Thus, any notion that would have a woman rid herself of her femininity in order to become holy, in order to be perceived as equal to man, or in order to find her worth, is distinctly anti-Christian.

That Christ reveals woman to herself is ultimately evident in the personhood of Mary. Saint John Paul II thus posits that Mary's cry, "He who is mighty has done great things for me":³⁰²

*Can also signify the discovery of her own feminine humanity. He "has done great things for me": this is the discovery of all the richness and personal resources of femininity, all the eternal originality of "woman", just as God wanted her to be, a person for her own sake, who discovers herself "by means of a sincere gift of self."*³⁰³

Overall, it can be seen that Christ treated all women with the true dignity owing to their worth as human persons and as women. "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand," brought into the midst of God's people by the Son of heaven, who is the Way and who reveals the way in which woman and her vocation to motherhood are rightly perceived in the Kingdom.³⁰⁴ Could not His command to, "Honour your father and mother," extend to the second part of the verse, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," and, in doing so, make this a command for society and all its members to honour every father and mother?³⁰⁵ In looking at the figure of Mary as revealed in the Gospels, Saint Edith Stein rightly acknowledges that the nature and original vocation of humanity, as male and female, and as male individuals and female individuals, may be "sought after and restored."³⁰⁶ This hope of a return to God's original intention for humanity is made achievable through divine adoption guaranteed by Christ's redemptive act.³⁰⁷

2.5. Conclusion

In the beginning humanity was created as male and female, thus revealing both a profound equality and recognisable difference between the sexes. In looking at the two greatest female figures of divine Revelation, one can see that motherhood is an

³⁰² Lk 1:49.

³⁰³ *MD*, 11.

³⁰⁴ Mt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7.

³⁰⁵ Mt 19:19. Cf. Ex 20:12; Lk 18:20; Eph 2:6.

³⁰⁶ Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexial Politics in the Hebrew Bible," 464.

³⁰⁷ Rom 8:13-17.

essentially feminine characteristic that marks woman as different from her male counterpart. This distinction is then clarified in the specific maternal roles that Eve and Mary play in the history of salvation.

In saying “yes” to become the mother of the Word made flesh, Mary made a covenant with God. Being full of grace, Mary was the perfect earthly representative for this New Covenant with God. Where earlier the Covenants had been broken time and time again, this New Covenant, made with she who is grace-filled and without sin, is eternal.³⁰⁸ The distinguishing characteristic of this New Covenant, the means by which it was brought into being, is motherhood. The implications of the New Covenant being made resolute through the union of Mary and her Son, Saint John Paul II notes, is that each and every time that motherhood is repeated in human history, it is always related to the Covenant that God established with the human race through the motherhood of the Mother of God.³⁰⁹ Could there possibly be a greater testament to the noble character of the vocation of motherhood?

Through this covenantal relationship, God thus ennoble motherhood. Through His earthly Sonship, Christ also continues this mission of restoration and glorification of the *imago Dei* in woman. He does this through His relationship with His mother, Mary, as well as through His interactions with the women of the Gospels. In doing so, Christ reveals the dignity owing to woman as a virtue of her creation as well as the fundamental role of motherhood in both the discovery of woman’s personhood and in the economy of salvation. Christ also restores and ennoble the union between the two sexes through His own union as a man with the women around Him, and most especially through His intimate union with His mother.

As motherhood has been determined to be an essential vocation of woman, one can deduce that women who seek to do away with this vocation or confine it to a limited time and space of their lives, will experience great difficulty in realising, fulfilling, and expressing both their femininity and humanity.³¹⁰ This thesis thus moves to begin bringing what has been discussed so far into today’s context. It will explore how woman is called to live out this vocation to motherhood, especially in a society that

³⁰⁸ Heb 13:20.

³⁰⁹ *MD*, 11.

³¹⁰ Kathleen Curran Sweeney likewise draws this conclusion. (Sweeney, “The Perfection of Women as Maternal and the Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła,” 151.)

pushes that woman's self-discovery lies, not in motherhood, but in the pursuit of autonomy and certain successes.

3. The Implications of the Scriptural Christian Concept of Motherhood in a Contemporary Context

Recognition of the inner form of the feminine soul permits further inferences regarding woman's eternal and particular vocation.¹

3.1 Introduction

So far it has been established that femininity is an intentional part of the created order and that, alongside spousal love, the Creator has placed at the heart of woman's person her vocation to motherhood. Sin obscured and diminished the concept of motherhood, but this vocation finds its affirmation, restoration and perfection in the person of Mary and her Son, Christ.

This thesis now moves to ask what implications these conclusions have for woman in the contemporary context? What does this redeemed image of motherhood look like today? And, can motherhood actually be said to still be a blessing for woman? Furthermore, if motherhood is indeed an essential part of womanhood, what does this mean for those women today who cannot have children, or do not want to have children? And, lastly, how does a woman live out her vocation to motherhood if she feels called to a Vocation outside of the home, such as religious life, or if she is also called to a vocation in the professional sphere?

Such questions are large and could each be addressed with their own separate research endeavours. Hence, the answers given in this one chapter will not take into particular consideration the countless factors influencing the aforementioned views and queries. Instead, this chapter aims to shed some light on what underlies the questions at hand. To accomplish this task, this chapter will begin by first looking at the necessary objectivity of femininity and motherhood, and three primary reasons by which motherhood can be seen to be blessed. Moving forward with these two underlying truisms – that motherhood is an essential part of womanhood and that it is unquestionably good – efforts will then be made to look at how woman can be mother

¹ Sweeney, "The Perfection of Women as Maternal and the Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła," 151.

in the three most common vocational environments of home, religious life, and the work place.²

In doing so, it will then become apparent that the answer to the current questions and struggles concerning motherhood resides in a return to two realities exemplified in the person of Mary: the inherent union of the physical and the spiritual and authentic selfless love.

3.2. Logical Implications

3.2.1. A Duality of Sexes, Not of Nature

The Necessity of Distinction Between Male and Female Revisited

Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”³

There are numerous detrimental social constructs concerning who woman is, what her true value to society is, and what the nature of her capacity to bring forth new life entails. For the most part, what Western society currently professes is that gender is a variable dependent on subjective taste, context, and needs.⁴ Consequently, as Brenda Finlayson notes, “Women renounce their ‘reproductive role’ as an injustice that prevents them from being equal to men in terms of social functions, and the predisposition of the body for maternity is an enemy to be fought.”⁵ According to this mode of thought, woman’s calling to be a mother can be considered as a stereotype in need of deconstruction, or as a fallacy that keeps woman confined to the house and unable to achieve her ‘true’ potential.⁶

² In speaking of these three environments, it should be noted that, in line with Saint Edith Stein, despite being mentioned together, they are not spoken of as if they have the same status or value. Due to their sacramental nature, married life and consecrated virginity are of primary value. The professional sphere is mentioned alongside these two sacraments, not as if to say that it is also sacramental, but because, beyond the home and the convent, the married woman and the consecrated virgin may also live out their feminine vocation of motherhood in the work place.

³ Jn 11:37-40.

⁴ Danese and Di Nicola, “Woman and Man: Created One for the Other,” 105. See also, Marguerite A. Peteers, “Gender: An Anthropological Deconstruction and a Challenge for Faith,” 91.

⁵ Brenda Finlayson, “Guardians of Spousal and Maternal Love,” 386.

⁶ Of course, ‘true’ here is not the true theological potential of woman as presented by this thesis, but the so called ‘true’ potential of woman as prescribed by society.

Janne Haaland Matlary, the former foreign minister of Norway who took part in the international conference commemorating the twentieth anniversary of *MD*, concluded the session on problems and contemporary cultural trends, urging that:

In a world where often biology has been given too much emphasis – women have been seen as child-bearers only, and still are seen as such in many cultures – and where the constructed nature of certain sex roles have been over-emphasised as well, rendering the differences between the sexes insignificant, as a mere ‘social construct’. The latter ideology is a major problem in the west today.⁷

In a basic sense, society’s answer to the oppression of woman seems to generally be the rejection of there existing anything one can objectively call woman.⁸ Another way of putting this would be to speak of the tendency to deny the objective existence of two distinct genders according to their natural connotation.⁹ The consequence of this philosophy is a rejection of the notion that the body and nature condition a person’s way of being human in any way. This of course includes woman’s capacity to conceive and bear children. But, as concluded in the first chapter, in order for humanity to image the communal nature of His Creator, sexual difference must have an objective value.¹⁰ There ceases to be communion if there ceases to be two distinct “I”s. Sexual difference is thus directly and inextricably related to our humanity. For woman, to speak of an objective femininity would entail that no one could any longer speak of femininity or motherhood as being mere social constructs.

Would not, then, the liberation of woman from gendered oppression be found in the reappropriation and exaltation of her femininity, rather than the complete annihilation of it?¹¹ If an image had become obscured or diminished, would not the answer to its restoration be the un-obscuration of the image? For example, if a photograph of a deceased loved one had been marred and faded by the effects of time and neglect, one would not simply toss it away and try to recreate the original image by dressing up as that loved one in the photograph. Such measures could never truly recreate the original photograph of the deceased loved-one. The result could only ever be phony. No, the wiser person would take the damaged image to a photo specialist in order for it to be restored.

⁷ Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 338.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Danese and Di Nicola, “Woman and Man: Created One for the Other,” 105.

¹⁰ 2.2.2, 24.

¹¹ *MD*, 10.

In line with this analogy, it then begins to make sense why indeed society is doing away with the original image, or “photo,” of woman. Where secularisation reigns, two detrimental conclusions are reached: firstly, even if society did authentically desire to restore this photo, this image of woman, with no belief in God (or any transcendent being) to whom could they turn as the original “photographer,” and hence “photo restorer”? Secondly, without a belief in an original and intentional Creator, one can only conclude that this photo must be a mere human construction or an image captured in some dated stage in the evolutionary process. Why then should society even hold on to this image or seek to restore it? Indeed, from where comes this supposed mandate to even have an objective image of woman at all?

It would go beyond the scope of this thesis to try and posit answers to these pressing questions, as this thesis is looking particularly at the Christian concept of motherhood. What can be said is that, contrary to the majority of Western society, Christians do have the gift faith, and hence the gift to know that, not only is humanity’s person created with an intentional design, but also that no degree of obscurity and diminishment caused by sin can reckon the *imago Dei* in humanity irredeemable. The knowledge that there is indeed a Creator and a Redeemer, a “Photographer,” so to speak, and a “photograph Restorer” is thus a source of hope and consolation for Christians. Christianity’s “photograph Restorer” not only restored the original image of woman to its original clarity through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, He restored it beyond its original condition to something even truer, even more glorious, even more in accord with the original intention of the Creator.¹²

With these underlying principles of objectivity and hope, this thesis thus moves forward in an effort to disclose the nature and practicality of this unobscured and undiminished image of motherhood. In a basic but absolutely fundamental sense, as has been revealed so far, this disclosure of the unobscured and undiminished image of motherhood must begin with a look at her basic human nature before moving to see what it means for a person to be a female human. In doing so, a more complete image of the Christian concept of motherhood will be formed, enabling this thesis to then translate this image into the contemporary context.

¹² For more, see, Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human,” 25-26.

The Necessary Reunification of the Physical and the Spiritual

Janne Haaland Matlary highlights the problem of the Western ideology of sexual subjectivity.¹³ It has been concluded that, in accord with God's design, sexual difference is directly and inextricably related to a person's humanity. Hence, for a society which has lost sense of the distinct and objective goodness of the sexes, the redemptive work of Christ in relation to femininity is concerned with the elucidation and reappropriation of what exactly it means to be female. Janne Haaland Matlary concluded that, at the heart of the Western ideology of sexual subjectivity was/is an overemphasis on the biological.¹⁴ It thus seems that a restoration of modern perceptions of femininity is linked to a restoration of the imbalance between the physical and the spiritual.

The first chapter of this thesis revealed that humanity was created as a duality – male and female. Male is a distinct separate person from female, and vice versa, but as one they make humanity. It was then further elucidated that the human person is essentially comprised of two elements: a soul/a spiritual element, and a body/a physical element. This duality of body and soul bears likeness to the duality of male and female in the sense that, just as male and female together comprise what is humanity, the body and soul together comprise what is the human person.¹⁵ However, it must be observed that, whilst male and female separate from each other are still human persons, the human person ceases to be when the soul and body are apart from each other. The human person is thus not a body and soul distinct from each other but is body and soul in union.¹⁶ And so it is that one can conclude that motherhood, as a human vocation, is both and at once a physical and spiritual vocation.

Indeed, as humanity is a unity of the physical and the spiritual, it would seem that one cannot rightly speak of “spiritual motherhood” and “physical motherhood” as two distinct notions that can be spoken of in exclusivity of the other. Saint John Paul II does speak of all corporeal generation, and thus motherhood, as being analogous to

¹³ See quote on 123.

¹⁴ Again, one is reminded of the section of the first chapter of this thesis. See, 1.2.1.2.

¹⁵ Paola Bignardi, “Women's Responsibility and Participation in Building up the Church and Society,” 137.

¹⁶ Refer to first chapter. See also *MD*, 3.

and modeled after the eternal generation of God.¹⁷ Yet, he also states that the “Fatherhood” of God is radically different to human generation as eternal generation is entirely spiritual in essence, whereas in the human order generation is proper to the “unity of the two.”¹⁸ Now, of course this unity is in reference to the unity of man and woman. But, by virtue of the fact that Saint John Paul II is also speaking about the dual physical and spiritual nature of human generation, it seems plausible that one could also extend this conclusion to likewise speak of the unity of the physical and spiritual natures of the human parent.

In turning to Mary as the exemplar of womanhood and of motherhood, one sees in her that the fullness of human motherhood is entirely physical and spiritual. She is “perfectly open” to the gift of Christ - “God’s salvific giving of Himself and His life.”¹⁹ Her *fiat* at the Annunciation foreshadows the words of her Son during the Last Supper: “This is My Body given up for you.”²⁰ Christ’s sacrifice of His self for the salvation of all was thus possible because of Mary’s openness to offering herself – both physically and spiritually – to the life of her Saviour.

Mary thus reveals that motherhood, by nature, is openness and the complete gift of self. And, as humanity is a union of body and soul, this self-gift naturally entails a gift that is both physical and spiritual in nature. In line with this revelation and with the aforementioned conclusion that motherhood as a human vocation is necessarily physical and spiritual, there is no room left for duality. Hence also why, in relation to motherhood, Paola Bignardi warns against the mutual absolutisation of biological and spiritual motherhood, and instead insists that women guard and protect experiences that involve both of them.²¹ To speak of a motherhood confined to the physical or spiritual alone, would not just limit the vocation of motherhood, it would not truly be motherhood at all. In reference to their vocation, woman hence cannot say, in the strictest of senses, “I am a spiritual mother,” or, “I am a physical mother.” Every physical motherhood demands spiritual motherhood; every spiritual motherhood demands physical sacrifice and care.

¹⁷ *MD*, 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *RM*, 1. Cf. Jas 1:17.

²⁰ Lk 1:38. Cf. Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:17.

²¹ Bignardi, “Women’s Responsibility and Participation in Building up the Church and Society,” 137.

This clarification of unity, however, is not made so as to present an argument against the use of the term “spiritual motherhood.” Employed prominently by Saint John Paul II, who has produced perhaps the most prominent and influential anthropological theology and reflections on femininity, it would seem entirely imprudent to discard the term “spiritual motherhood.” In reference to the vocation of the consecrated virgin, one can see that Saint John Paul II is deliberate in his word choice. Instead of speaking of the self-gift of the consecrated virgin as being spiritual in nature, he speaks of it as being spiritual in character.²² One can thus see here, not a discard or disregard of the physical, but simply a use of the term “spiritual” as the exceptional characteristic that so sets the motherhood of the consecrated virgin apart from the motherhood of the married woman. This thesis, thus, likewise employs this term in this chapter. However, so as not to be in contradiction to the conclusion reached above, and in accordance the usage of this term by Saint John Paul II, it must be noted that it is not used in reference to some inhuman form of motherhood entirely separate from the physical but is employed simply as a term to describe certain aspects of motherhood, primarily the educational aspect of parenthood.²³

3.2.2. We Love Because He First Loved Us

*The significance of motherhood for Christian spirituality is rooted in the incarnation.*²⁴

As earlier stated, one reason behind the degradation of woman and her vocation to motherhood is the historical consignment of her person to the domestic life. In this sense, woman was deemed inferior simply because of her distinct biological design which enabled her to conceive and bear children.²⁵ It has been stated that woman is not simply biological or spiritual, thus any reduction of her person to one of these aspects is false and degrading.²⁶ The question still remains, though, if woman’s

²² *MD*, 20.

²³ *ibid*, 19.

²⁴ Lyn Holness, “Motherhood and Spirituality: Faith Reflections from the Inside,” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 61 (2004): 68.

²⁵ Albrecht, *Is There an Objective Type ‘Woman’?*, 35-39; Peteers, “Gender: An Anthropological Deconstruction and a Challenge for Faith,” 289.

²⁶ Bignardi, “Women’s Responsibility and Participation in Building up the Church and Society,” 137.

capacity to physically bear children is really something that impedes or ceases her pursuit of fulfilment and hence reckons her inferior to men.²⁷

Saint John Paul II reads the creation accounts of Genesis in light of Saint Paul's spousal analogies in his letter to the Ephesians, stating that woman loves in response to first being loved.²⁸ The Bride as woman and, analogously, as the Church, is first loved that she may then love in return.²⁹ This conclusion is drawn from the analogy, for, with Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride, Christ's love is of course antecedent. In accord with the nature of humanity's creation, it is a general rule for man and woman alike, that love can only be given after first being received. As Saint John writes, "We love because He first loved us."³⁰ Saint John Paul II reveals that, in the order of love, this receiving first and giving second is especially the case for woman.³¹ "A woman's dignity," he writes, "is closely connected with the love she receives by the very reason of her femininity."³²

One can think of this paradox practically in relation to the conception of a child. Woman is generally considered to have an esteemed relationship with her child (above that of any other).³³ Nonetheless, woman is only able to pour out her nurture and affection on the child by first receiving the love of her husband, by first receiving that part of himself which enables new life to begin within her.³⁴ This example also calls to mind the creation of woman. The new life that was woman only took place as a

²⁷ Again, although this question is asked, it is well known that in the Christian concept of motherhood, such is not the case. However, in the contemporary context where the blessing of fertility is oft perceived as an obstacle or inconvenience, why this is not so needs to be explicated.

²⁸ *MD*, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ 1 Jn 4:19.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 30.

³³ This will be looked at in greater attention later.

³⁴ In accord with Saint John Paul II, this thesis likewise upholds the act of sexual intercourse as nothing less than a mutual self-knowing and self-gift. Hence, any reference to the act of the man as antecedent in this section of this thesis, is not to deny this ideal of complete mutuality/communion but simply to make a point by looking at the practical chronology of actions as bearing semblance to the points being made by Saint John Paul II in relation to woman's role in the order of love. Now, it must be noted that stating that woman must be loved first by her husband is a statement of the ideal. It is not, in any way, to insinuate that those women who are not loved by their husbands as the ought to be, or woman who become pregnant by means of abuse or some other act anything apart from loving, are not able to love their children in return. Indeed, the statement that woman love because they are first loved is first and foremost in relation to God. Thus, even without the love of a husband, to whatever degree, the love of God enables them to love their child.

result of man's gift of self.³⁵ Does stating such confer a sense of primacy to the man, as if to say, "I am only to love as a result of you first giving me love"?

Here the fruits of the inequality that resulted from the Fall can be readily seen. Due to the fallen tendency of man to dominate woman, when looking at any matter concerning the relations between man and woman, the first conclusion that springs to mind is almost always one of disunity. It is not a matter of partnership or companionship, but of domination and subordination. Nonetheless, in Christ, "there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."³⁶ Highlighting the receptivity of woman's person in the sexual act is thus not to infer that woman is, in any way lesser.³⁷

In the order of Redemption, one can readily say that man is not superior to woman because he is the initiator, and in this sense "loves first." His loving first seems to simply be a matter of chronology, not supremacy, ascendancy, quantity, or quality.³⁸ Indeed, in returning to the creation of woman, one can hence see that it was God who initiated, enacted, and completed this work.³⁹ What was the involvement of man and woman? It was nothing other than an act of surrender to the working of the divine. Just as Adam lay down to sleep that God may bring about a helper fit for him, one can see that, in relation to the blessing of conceiving new life, it is in the simply laying down of their lives as an act of love for the other, and as an act of loving surrender to God, that new life is able to come into being.

Furthermore, far from being lesser as a result of the initially receptive nature of woman's love, both Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein acknowledge that woman has an esteemed place within this order of love. As a human person, the dignity of woman lies in the love of God for her, but specifically as a female, the dignity of woman lies in her great capacity to return this love.⁴⁰ "The dignity of women is measured by the order of love", Saint John Paul II writes.⁴¹ It is by this truth that woman's vocation is determined, and, "unless we refer to this order and primacy we cannot give a complete and adequate answer to the question about women's dignity

³⁵ Refer to first chapter.

³⁶ Gal 3:28. Cf. Jn 17:11, 21, 23; Rom 3:22; 1 Cor 12:13

³⁷ *MD*, 29.

³⁸ Refer also back to the first chapter and its comments the second creation narrative's presentation of man as being created before woman.

³⁹ Refer back to Genesis 1 and 2.

⁴⁰ *MD*, 30.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 29.

and vocation.”⁴² This discovery of woman’s vocation also requires a reference to the primacy of love as affirmed by Saint Paul in the first of his Letters to the Corinthians.⁴³

If indeed love has primacy, as Saint Paul wrote, then woman’s vocation to motherhood is not only affirmed, but also elevated.⁴⁴ In this sense, one can say that woman’s love is all at once secondary as well as primary.⁴⁵ Secondary in that woman is only able to love as a result of first being loved, but primary as the love that she does love with is exceptional. Again, it can thus be seen that, in terms of necessity and influence, woman’s love is by no means secondary. Saint John Paul II thus writes:

When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all persons - men and women.⁴⁶

The truth that woman receives love in order to love in return is hence not limited to her relationship with her Creator, nor to the spousal relationship, but is equally true for all of her interactions. Such is the basis for Saint Edith Stein’s conclusion that women are, by nature, bent towards the care and nurture of others.⁴⁷ Brenda Finlayson carries this farther to speak of this particular aspect of motherhood in an evangelical manner: “Mothers,” she writes, “are responsible for making the love of Christ take flesh in their lives and in the lives of others and to recognise Him in the love of those they meet.”⁴⁸ This especially Marian facet of motherhood, to make Christ incarnate, reveals the ennobled nature of motherhood in accordance with the highest Christian calling: “To show forth the image of God and to be transformed into the image of the Father’s only Son.”⁴⁹ The manifestation of Christ through motherhood thus makes the vocation a great blessing for the woman, for her family, as well as for the world.

⁴² Ibid (emphasis omitted).

⁴³ 1 Cor 13:1-13. See also *MD*, 29.

⁴⁴ 1 Cor 13:13.

⁴⁵ Of course, this is the ideal being spoken of here. The woman who is loved first does not always love in return. Nonetheless, the imperfect nature of human love by no means compromises the eternal Love that it is called to image.

⁴⁶ *MD*, 29. See also, Finlayson, “Guardians of Spousal and Maternal Love,” 386.

⁴⁷ Refer back to earlier chapters.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 390.

⁴⁹ CCC 1877. For more, see, Freda Mary Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein* (New York: Alba House, 2001), 71.

3.2.3. *The Blessedness of Motherhood*

*In this broad and diversified context, a woman represents a particular value by the fact that she is a human person, and, at the same time, this particular person, by the fact of her femininity. This concerns each and every woman, independently of the cultural context in which she lives, and independently of her spiritual, psychological and physical characteristics, as for example, age, education, health, work, and whether she is married or single.*⁵⁰

So far it has been established that motherhood is indeed good and plays an irreplaceable role in the development of woman's identity, as well as in the development of society as a whole. However, so far, all references to motherhood have been made in a predominantly general manner, applicable to any and every woman, regardless of her own particular Vocation. This thesis must now move into specifics. Firstly, biological motherhood shall be looked at in order to ascertain its particular blessing.

The goodness of biological motherhood (and of course fatherhood) is a pertinent topic for, as highlighted by Saint John Paul II, society today asks: "Is it really true that the new human being is a gift for his parents?"⁵¹ Bombarded with the so called 'ideals' of individualism, consumerism, and subjectivity, incredulous of the existence of a Creator who has a distinct purpose for His creation, and doubtful of the goodness of their parental vocations, contemporary society seems to posit this question primarily out of a selfish scepticism born of ignorance.

Saint John Paul II gives voice to the prominent, underlying philosophies of - society concerning parenthood when he writes:

A gift for society? Apparently, nothing seems to indicate this. On occasion the birth of a child appears to be a simple statistical fact, registered like so many other data in demographic records. It is true that for the parents the birth of a child means more work, new financial burdens and further inconveniences, all of which can lead to the temptation not to want another birth. In some social and cultural contexts this temptation can become very strong. Does this mean that a child is not a gift? That it comes into the world only to take and not to give? These are some of the disturbing questions which men and women today find hard to

⁵⁰ *MD*, 29.

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 1994, 11.

escape. *A child comes to take up room, when it seems that there is less and less room in the world.*⁵²

But is it really true that a child brings nothing to the parent, to family and to society, or, if something, then something only secondary or non-essential? Is it really true that a child takes a parent away from the fulfilment of self, rather than being an essential part of it? Is the conception of a child simply a rational human being's contribution to the perpetuation of the human race?⁵³ Or is there an inherent and indispensable value in the conception and rearing of children? These are the type of questions that this section will attempt to answer. Whilst a valid counter argument could be built from the standpoint of a child's value and contribution to the common good, this section will instead attempt to offer an antithesis of the individualism presented as the societal ideal by looking at the blessing of fertility.

Co-operating in the Work of the Divine

There are a range of factors to take into consideration when pondering why, in the contemporary context, new life appears to be viewed as more of a 'curse' or inconvenience, than as a blessing.⁵⁴ Interlinked with individualism, consumerism, gender feminism, and other common ideologies, Elena Lugo puts forward that one of the prime reasons for this misconception of the blessing of fecundity is the contraceptive mentality and technological scientific mentality of postmodernity.⁵⁵ She writes:

The idea is being put forward that fertility or the ability to procreate are biological events that are sub-personal and have no particular significance, and that they belong and are receptive to a voluntary decision that bestows them with instrumental goodness.⁵⁶

The consequence of such a mentality is that fecundity becomes a good *for* the person, as opposed to an inherent good *of* the person. Being able to conceive and bear children is hence interpreted as a good for the parent involved if it is measured to be able to

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Now, of course the majority of society would speak in such impersonal and callous phrases, but these questions undeniably underline some of the "life" choices individuals and couples make today.

⁵⁴ Note here that 'curse' is used apart from spiritual connotations.

⁵⁵ Elena Lugo, "The Rejection of Motherhood and Family," in *Woman and Man: The Humanum in its Entirety*, ed. The Pontifical Council for the Laity (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2010), 322.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 323. See also, Cardinal Antonio Canizares Llovera, "Reflection on the Subject of Women Twenty Years after the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*: Evaluation and Prospects."

provide value and purpose.⁵⁷ Hence, if no value or purpose is perceived, then fecundity loses its goodness. Motherhood is then deemed subordinate to the dominant subjective criterion of pregnancy understood purely as a biological process. The consequence of this, as Elena Lugo notes, is that, “Woman do not recognise the inherent value of their corporeity but see it as an instrumental value that depends on their will.”⁵⁸ With this mentality, any unplanned pregnancy is seen as an obstacle to plans, a negative risk of sexual union, or as a rebuttal of woman’s personal control over her physical ability to be a mother.⁵⁹

For the sake of the majority of women today, therefore, this thesis must begin by looking at how it is that the Church comes to objectively uphold fecundity as a genuine source of blessing for woman.⁶⁰ As briefly touched on in the first chapter, the primary blessing of fecundity is its reflection of, and participation in, Trinitarian fruitfulness.⁶¹ Humanity, being created in the image and likeness of God is marked by life-generating Love, that is, His creative capacity.⁶² With this in mind, Saint John Paul II asserts that, “begetting is the continuation of Creation.”⁶³ In this way, when woman conceives and bears forth a child, she is revealed as being created in the *imago Dei*. This image of God in humanity, hence, is not merely a static reflection, as if humanity was a mirror for the eternal, but the image of God in humanity is also an active likeness. Woman images her Creator in her ability to conceive and bear forth life, but in doing so, her imaging of the creative work of God is also a participation in it.⁶⁴

That new life is the result of cooperation with the Divine, is also evident in Scripture. Scripturally, the conception and birth of a new human being is accompanied by the woman’s cry: “I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord.”⁶⁵ Saint John Paul II writes that, “This exclamation of Eve, the ‘mother of all the living,’ is repeated every time a new human being comes into the world. It expresses the woman’s joy and

⁵⁷Elena Lugo adds here that this mentality, separating the unitive and the personal, the procreative and the biological, is, as this thesis has highlighted often, fundamentally rooted in classical dualism (Elena Lugo, “The Rejection of Motherhood and Family”).

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 323.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 323-24.

⁶⁰ Again, this is also very much true for fecundity and its relationship to masculinity and fatherhood.

⁶¹ For more on this, see, *MD*; and *FC*, 28.

⁶² Refer to first chapter.

⁶³ *LF*, 9.

⁶⁴ *FC*, 28. Weinandy, “St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human,” 20, 30. See also Marie Noonan Sabin who speaks more specifically on the unique participation woman shares in the creative work of the Divine, Sabin, “Becoming Christ: The Vocation of Women in Theology and Scripture,” 159.

⁶⁵ Gn 4:1. See *MD*, 18.

awareness that she is sharing in the great mystery of eternal generation.⁶⁶ The spouses share in the creative power of God!”⁶⁷ In the cry of Eve one sees foreshadowed the role of Mary as handmaid of the Lord. The conception of Christ was indeed the procreative work of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ In her *fiat*, Mary, as the exemplar of motherhood, reveals that the redeemed cry of the mother is no longer, “I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord,” but, “the Lord has brought a man into the world with the help of myself.”⁶⁹ It is only through cooperation with the Divine that woman fulfills her maternal vocation.⁷⁰

It is with this in mind that Margaret McCarthy, in response to feminism’s belittling of motherhood, asks: “How one could speak of pregnancy as Beauvoir does, while practically yawning? How is it that a woman, no less, can lend her hand so readily to putting down women precisely at the point where she is most unique-not to mention creative and powerful?”⁷¹ As revealed in Mary, this cooperation with the work of the Divine in conception also extends beyond the individual to the greater plan of salvation history.⁷² The mother plays an especial role in this salvific, procreative work.⁷³ In light of the Incarnation, one sees that begetting, in particular, Mary’s begetting, is not just the continuation of creation, but the very fulfilment of it.⁷⁴ Thus Saint John Paul II moves on to say that, the conception and birth of Christ into this world as a human infant is a paschal sign.⁷⁵ Motherhood and fecundity are thus blessings by virtue of their being means by which woman enters into the work of the Divine and actively participates in the economy of salvation.

Motherhood as Self-discovery

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. See also, CCC 2372, 74.

⁶⁸ Lk 1:34-35. Cf. Mt 1:18.

⁶⁹ Gen 4:1.

⁷⁰ Jn 15:5.

⁷¹ McCarthy, “‘Something Not to Be Grasped’: Notes on Equality on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem*,” 132. Note here that Margaret McCarthy is referring to French writer, Simone de Beauvoir, an existentialist philosopher of the early twentieth century, whose work laid the foundation for the modern feminist movement.

⁷² In *Redemptoris Mater*, when addressing the role of Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation, one reads: “Just as all are included in the creative work of God “in the beginning,” so all are eternally included in the divine plan of salvation, which is to be completely revealed in the “fullness of time,” with the final coming of Christ.”*RM*, 1. Cf. Eph 1:4-7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *MD*, 3-6.

⁷⁵ *LF*, 11.

Indeed this definition of the person, corresponds to the fundamental biblical truth about the creation of the human being – man and woman – in the image and likeness of God. This is not a purely theoretical interpretation, nor an abstract definition, for it gives an essential indication of what it means to be human, while emphasizing the value of the gift of self, the gift of the person. In this vision of the person we also find the essence of that “ethos” which, together with the truth of creation, will be fully developed by the books of Revelation, particularly the Gospels. This truth about the person also opens up the path to a full understanding of woman’s motherhood.⁷⁶

Motherhood may indeed be termed a blessing due to its participation in the redemptive plan of God. However, to a society that promotes individualism, this answer might not seem appealing or satisfactory. Is it possible, then, to argue for the goodness of motherhood from an apparently individualistic perspective?

When speaking of the concept of motherhood in *MD*, Saint John Paul II posits that one can properly understand the gift of motherhood by returning to the fundamental truths about the human person.⁷⁷ As has been elucidated earlier, these fundamental truths about the human person are that humanity is created: good, in the *imago Dei* as male and female, and with the tasks of dominion and fecundity. As a consequence of these truths, the underlying truism that Saint John Paul II continually returns to in order to speak of motherhood is that humanity is created to be a gift of self. As such, it is only in sincerely giving oneself that one is able to discover who they are and for what they were created.⁷⁸

In *MD*’s chapter on motherhood, Saint John Paul II speaks of the sexual act that leads to motherhood with the Biblical term of man and woman “knowing” each other.⁷⁹ It is interesting to consider this use of the term “knowing” as going hand in hand with the knowledge and discovery of self that comes about as a result of self-gift. The marital union is a knowing of the other but, as the marital union involves a complete self-gift to the other, it also involves a discovery of self. A significant part of this self-discovery, most especially for the woman, is the natural fruit of the marital union the conception and birth of a child.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ *MD*, 18 (emphasis omitted).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ For example, see *MD*, 18. Cf. Gn 2:24.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* See also, Sabin, “Becoming Christ: The Vocation of Women in Theology and Scripture,” 159-60.

In light of chapter one, the foundation and model for the human person and for humanity as a whole, is grounded in Trinitarian life. It is then to this model that one must turn when asking what role woman plays in the modern family. The divine mystery of the Trinity is marked by a communion which exists due to complete Self-gift. What Saint John Paul II makes apparent, is that this self-gift is not an invasive imposition of oneself upon another, as if to say, “Here I am, receive me.” Rather, Saint John Paul II reveals the nature of this self-gift by his often speaking of self-gift in proximity with the quality of “openness” of self to the other.⁸¹

That motherhood is characterised by this notion of gift is also seen in Eve and Mary. For woman to live in authenticity with the *imago Dei* inscribed deep within her person, then, she must exemplify this openness of her Creator. As the first mother, Eve cried: “I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord.”⁸² She testifies that it is God, her Creator, who is the source of the gift of her son. “On the woman's part, this fact is linked in a special way to ‘a sincere gift of self’.”⁸³ Mary, as the exemplar of all that woman reveals through her *fiat* that the maternal disposition is one of complete openness to the will of God. This openness bears literal fruit in the physical conception of the divine within her person. As seen in Mary, the openness of woman is a *fiat* to the intimate opening of her own person to the reception of new life within her, an openness which is more commonly referred to as motherhood. “Women's special capacity for child-birth, and care for the infant is held up as the reason for women's special capacity for such self-giving, which is the essence of the feminine itself. It is also the exemplar of true Christian behaviour.”⁸⁴

Motherhood is hence specifically connected to the personal dimension of self-gift and thus also of self-discovery.⁸⁵ Consequently, one can infer that the woman closed to new life is a woman, not just closed to others, but closed to her Creator and indeed closed to herself. It is only when she lives in accord with God's design for her as an individual woman that she is truly human. Hence, at the same time, only when she is truly mother is she then truly woman and thus truly human.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Gn 4:1

⁸³ *MD*, 18.

⁸⁴ Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 338. See also *MD*, 18.

⁸⁵ *MD*, 18.

3.3. Practical Implications

3.3.1. Barrenness – “Give me children or I will die”: The Plight of the Barren Woman

*To Christian couples... We have no wish at all to pass over in silence the difficulties, at times very great, which beset the lives of Christian married couples. For them, as indeed for every one of us, “the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life.” Nevertheless it is precisely the hope of that life which, like a brightly burning torch, lights up their journey, as, strong in spirit, they strive to live “sober, upright and godly lives in this world,” knowing for sure that “the form of this world is passing away.”*⁸⁶

So far, this thesis has concluded that every woman is indeed called to be mother. A large part of the contemporary context has and does include women who are physically incapable of bearing children for one reason or another. In *Love and Responsibility*, Saint John Paul II states that both love and procreation are based upon the conscious choice of a couple.⁸⁷ But, in the case of infertility, no matter how earnestly a couple may choose to have children, if their bodies are incapable of doing so, then their bodies have the final say.⁸⁸ If indeed woman is only truly woman when she is mother, and if she only realises the fullness of her humanity through the living out of this vocation, what then are the implications for the woman who is physically or “psychologically” barren?

The relative silence of Saint John Paul II in *MD* on the issue of barrenness seems to be representative of the Church’s general approach to this issue. The Catechism of the Catholic Church typifies what appears to be a common theological approach to barrenness. It begins with the brief observation of the extent to which couples who cannot have children suffer.⁸⁹ This statement is supported and illustrated by the cry of Abraham to God, “What will you give me for I continue childless,”⁹⁰ and the desperate plea of Rachel to her husband Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die.”⁹¹ The Catechism then immediately goes straight to the condemnation of various unnatural

⁸⁶ *Humanae Vitae* (hereafter *HV*), 25. This was one of the closing statements of *Humanae Vitae*, given more specifically in reference to Christian couples and the use of contraceptives. However, it seems equally applicable here in this brief discussion on barrenness.

⁸⁷ Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 226.

⁸⁸ Of course, this is said in a general sense. God is always greater than any physical infirmity and miracles can and do happen.

⁸⁹ CCC 2374.

⁹⁰ Gn 15:2.

⁹¹ Gn 30:1.

alternatives to conceiving a child.⁹² In this sense, it seems as though the Church, whilst briefly offering sympathy, is primarily concerned with addressing the ethical issues that can come to seem appealing in the desperation and longing of an infertile couple.

The answer given by the Catechism is not surprising, and is necessary, especially given society's ideology that having a child is not so much a blessing, as it is a right.⁹³ This way of thinking manifests itself both in the belief that one should be able to use unnatural methods in order to be able to have a child, as well as the relentless push of contraceptives.⁹⁴ The vocalisation of the Church on contraceptives and unnatural means of conception is ultimately a defense of the goodness of the human person as declared by God in the beginning. Furthermore, the Church's affirmation of the great value and dignity of the gift of life is ultimately an affirmation of the great value and dignity of motherhood, to which this new life is entrusted.

Although *MD* does not speak on means of unnatural conception, it does similarly exhibit this minimalistic approach to the discussion of barrenness. The reason this general silence is being noted is simply to highlight that, in an age where the reality of barrenness is increasingly affecting numerous couples, there does not appear to be much available that speaks on how the barren woman can fully live out her vocation to motherhood even in her barrenness.⁹⁵

While an in-depth study of barrenness would almost certainly prove beneficial, it is not feasible within the limited frame of this thesis. However, in using the theological reflection on the value and dignity of woman in *MD*, one is able to draw conclusions about the Christian concept of motherhood. In the knowledge that said conclusions apply to femaleness, and thus universally to every woman, one can then go another step further to speak of what these conclusions mean for the barren woman.

First and foremost, it can be concluded that the barren woman, before being barren, is a woman; she is not defined by her barrenness.⁹⁶ *MD* does specifically state that

⁹² CCC 2376 – 2377.

⁹³ CCC 2378; See also *HV*, 9.

⁹⁴ *HV*, 14-18.

⁹⁵ For more on the statistics of barrenness as well as types of barrenness and their causes, see, Agneta Sutton, *Infertility and Assisted Conception. What You Should Know. Answers to Questions About Medical Techniques of Assisted Conception.*

⁹⁶ Perhaps, then, a more correct way to speak of such a woman, then, is not by defining her as a 'barren woman', but as a woman, who suffers from barrenness.

children are a gift given to a couple by the Lord, but it does not conversely state that, if then a couple cannot conceive children, it is because God is withholding this gift from them.⁹⁷ Such is a conclusion seen readily in Scripture, where the barren woman is often labeled by self or society as cursed.⁹⁸ Scripture does indeed affirm that barrenness is not an intended part of God's creation. This is initially seen in the first blessing given to humanity of fruitfulness and multiplication.⁹⁹ It is also seen through the great suffering revealed to accompany the woman who is barren,¹⁰⁰ as well as through the revelation of fruitfulness as being a beatific part of God's eternal Kingdom.¹⁰¹ Woman bears an inherent goodness, and hence a goodness that is not diminished by the existence of physical ailments, barrenness included.

The connection of motherhood with the *imago Dei* renders it a fundamental part of womanhood. Just as the consecrated virgin woman does not become any less woman by virtue of her choice to forgo conceiving her own children, so too it is for the woman suffering from barrenness. Her motherhood remains and hence so does her feminine dignity. Like the consecrated virgin, her call to motherhood is manifest primarily in the area of spiritual maternity.¹⁰² Her motherhood hence may take the form of adoption and/or of reaching out to the "least of these."¹⁰³ In her barrenness, her fecundity is thus multiplied. In this way, as the Catechism states: "The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil."¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, that fecundity is revealed as an integral part of God's eternal Kingdom, is a source of hope for the barren woman. *MD*, also speaks of the hope of Christ that is always available for the barren woman by its reference to the Visitation. Mary proclaimed to her cousin Elizabeth, "He who is mighty has done great things for me."¹⁰⁵ These words could just as easily be proclaimed by the once barren Elizabeth who, at this time, was pregnant with John the Baptist. Surely her conception of Saint

⁹⁷ *MD*, 18-19.

⁹⁸ Stein, 2, 188. Cf. Gn 25:21; Job 15:34; 24:21; Pr 30:16; Is 49:21; Wis 4:19; etc. See also, Shapiro, "On Woman's Equal Standing in the Bible - a Sketch: A Feminist Re-Reading of the Hebrew Bible: A Typological View," 55.

⁹⁹ Gn 1:27.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Gn 25:21; Pr 30:16; Is 49:21; 54:1; etc.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Ex 23:26; Deut 7:14; 1 Sam 2:5; Ps 113:9; Is 54:1; Lk 23:29; Gal 4:27; etc.

¹⁰² *MD*, 21.

¹⁰³ Mt 25:40.

¹⁰⁴ CCC 2379.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 1:49. See *MD*, 11.

John is not distinct from the coming of Christ, the restorer of humanity?¹⁰⁶ Before Christ was even born, His reign was thus already marked by two accounts of miraculous fruitfulness. The proximity of the Kingdom is a source of life and healing. Whilst the suffering of not being able to have one's own child may be great; the barren woman can hence take consolation in the truth that her suffering will not be enduring.

On the other hand, it is not unheard of today that there are couples who are adamant not to have children. Again, when speaking of "psychological infertility," it must be noted that no reference is being made to an authentic clinical condition that can be professionally assessed and diagnosed, but one for ease of reference. In this context, "psychological infertility" is used to speak of the numerous individuals and couples who decide not to have children. Children, of course, provide immeasurable value to a parent's life, primarily through their necessitating their mother and father to move out of themselves and realise that their humanity is found in the gift of themselves to their child.¹⁰⁷ However, a child's value is too often deemed variable and measured by far more superficial factors. If they hinder one's ambitions, or provide substantial inconvenience, then the value the child provides is lessened, and hence not worth the cost of time, finances, and so forth. Hence, not too dissimilar than acquiring a new car, or buying a house, children are often viewed as optional elective additives to one's life.¹⁰⁸

That women choose not to have children for reasons of dislike, ambition, "freedom," etc., is not surprising in the modern context. What is startling, however, is that today there seem to be fervent Christian couples who have taken up the notion that their parental discernment extends beyond how many children God desires them to have and when God desires them to have children, to discerning whether or not God has called them to even have any of their own children at all.¹⁰⁹ In accord with the Church's long-standing tradition, in *MD*, Saint John Paul II asserts that the conception and rearing of children is something rightly reserved for marriage. The question at hand,

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁸ *FC*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ In accord with the Catholic understanding of a valid marriage, this view is erroneous. However, despite the inherent fallacy of this view, it is being mentioned simply for the fact that it does exist. But it is for its obvious falsehood that minimal time is being spent on it, save enough time to highlight what appears to be the underlying perceptions that lead people to reach this conclusion.

however, is asking if the reverse is also true – is a “yes” to marriage necessarily a “yes” to having children in the fullest sense, physically as well as spiritually?

Little will be stated here, apart from a brief question drawn out of the conclusions that have thus far been reached. As frequently aforementioned, the human person is a unity of the physical and spiritual.¹¹⁰ The sacrament of Marriage is most especially characterised by this union. Furthermore, it has been established: that fecundity is a blessing, that to be fruitful and multiply is to both live out the *imago Dei* as well as to participate in God’s own nature, that being a woman and being a mother are inseparable, that every person is made and called to selflessly give themselves to others, and that for woman, apart from spousal love, this is accomplished through motherhood. In consideration of the role motherhood plays in woman realising herself and reaching the true height of her God-given potential as a female and as an individual, one might then simply ask: Is having one’s own children an impediment to living life to the full? Or are one’s own children indeed the most important endeavour?

3.3.2. *Every Woman is Called to Be A Mother*

In the eighth chapter of *MD*, Saint John Paul II begins to conclude his brief discussion on the respondent nature of woman’s love, stating that:

The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that *God entrusts the human being to her in a special way*. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human being. But this entrusting concerns women in a special way - precisely by reason of their femininity - and this in a particular way determines their vocation.¹¹¹

This statement thus begs the question, if woman is not mother, wherein lies her strength? Indeed, in accordance with what can be witnessed at creation and what has been revealed through Christ, this thesis concludes that it is in woman’s nature to be mother. Hence, asking if every woman is called to be a mother seems as redundant as comparatively asking if every tree is called to have branches. The question needing to

¹¹⁰ Whilst this statement may seem exhausted, it has been made so frequently due the current attempts to apply the Christian concept of motherhood, as discovered in the previous chapters, to the contemporary context. Unfortunately, it seems to be that some of the misconceptions of what it means to be a mother and what motherhood entails are somehow derivative from dualistic misconceptions of what and who humanity is. Hence, the answer to current confusion lies in the clarification of what it properly means for the human person to be created as a union of body and soul, physical and spiritual.

¹¹¹ *MD*, 30.

be asked then is not whether or not woman is called to be mother, but how is woman called to be mother.

The vocation of every woman is to be virgin and mother.¹¹² The question of the individual woman's vocation is thus not a matter of "what?" but of "how?" Perhaps in order to understand this point a little clearer, one may consider a bag full of different tree seeds. Each tree seed is a tree seed, it will not grow into any other kind of plant. So, just as there is no need for a tree seed to discern whether or not it wants to grow up to be something other than what it is, there is no need for a woman to discern something outside of her natural parameters – whether or not to be a man, to be a mother, to be a virgin, and so forth. There is a need, however, for a discovery of what type of tree it is, and thus discernment as to what environment it needs to be planted in for it to best thrive and bring forth as much fruit as it is able.¹¹³

Accordingly, as the tree cannot discern to be other than what it is, woman cannot, by the sheer power of her will or ignorance be anything other than a who God created her to be.¹¹⁴ She is virgin and she is mother, because she is woman. Her duty as a person, and, more specifically as a woman, is then to discern as she grows, not whether or not she is called to be virgin and mother, but how she is called to live out these two aspects of her femininity. She discerns her own individuality so as to discover where it is that she may best grow, flower, bear fruit, and hence bring glory to her Creator.

At the heart of Saint Edith Stein's pedagogical work on woman seems to be the conclusion that the vocation of woman to motherhood and spousal love is primary. Whether a woman is called to live out this vocation through wedded life or consecrated virginity for the Kingdom is a desire placed on the heart of the individual by her Creator. The fullness of all feminine ideals is found in the Virgin Mother.¹¹⁵ In taking Mary as the source and model of true femininity, Saint Edith Stein states that the

¹¹² Stein, *Woman*, 101-02.

¹¹³ A mango tree planted in the depths of New Zealand's South Island would have minimal chance of survival, and most probably no hope of ever producing a crop. Similarly, plant a Pohutukawa tree in the Alps and one would never see its red flowers blooming over the Christmas season.

¹¹⁴ For more on this notion of the modern misconception of the human will having the power to alter nature, especially in relation to femininity, see, Jutta Burggraf, "The Mother of the Church and the Woman in the Church," 243-45.

¹¹⁵ Stein, *Woman*, 191-92.

educational process (including discernment) must consist in qualifying the individual female for both the wedded and the consecrated life.¹¹⁶

The following section will hence look at the main environments in which woman may be called to live out her vocation to motherhood. This will include the two primary states of marriage and consecrated virginity, as well as the additional environment of the professional world.

Motherhood Not Confined to the Home

*Whether she is a mother in the home, or occupies a place in the limelight of public life, or lives behind quiet cloister walls, she must be a handmaid of the Lord everywhere.*¹¹⁷

Just as woman does not leave her femininity behind when she walks out the door of her house, so too she is a mother not just in the home, but wherever she goes. However a woman elects to live her life, she cannot shake her God-given innate vocation to be a mother and a spouse. Thus, although motherhood is most readily seen in the domestic setting of family life, it is not something that can be compartmentalised to this one area.

Saint Edith Stein would say that there are three specific ways in which woman is able to fulfil the feminine vocation accorded to her by nature and grace. She can do such through, 1) marriage, 2) as a woman consecrated for the Lord, or/and, 3) in the practice of a profession which upholds human growth as the highest professional pursuit of woman.¹¹⁸ With the first environment already having been touched on, this section will now turn to the other two less spoken of areas of motherhood. It will do so by firstly looking at the motherhood of the consecrated virgin, specifically so that the nature of spiritual motherhood can be ascertained, followed by a glance at the relationship between motherhood and the workplace.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. See also, Gelber and Leuven, "Editor's Introduction," 13.

¹¹⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 52.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 41-56.

Spiritual Motherhood

*Only the person blinded by the passion of controversy could deny that woman in soul and body is formed for a particular purpose... The clear and irrevocable word of Scripture declares what daily experience teaches us from the beginning of the world: woman is destined to be wife and mother.*¹¹⁹

Just as one cannot separate the two dimensions of the feminine vocation – motherhood and virginity – so too one cannot rightly separate the physical and spiritual aspects of the feminine vocation. Both are bound together and comprise the personhood of woman. Motherhood, as with every aspect of the human person, is comprised fundamentally of the physical and the spiritual. Science reveals that woman is physically designed to be mother.¹²⁰ Yet, whilst rooted in biology, the motherhood of woman also goes beyond the mere physical dimension of motherhood.¹²¹ It is for this reason that Blanca Castilla de Cortazar states that, “The body is the expression of the person...the innermost expressed in visible.” In this sense, she adds, the body takes on a sort of sacramental significance.¹²²

In the sixth chapter of *MD* Saint John Paul II clearly states that spiritual motherhood is an essential part of physical motherhood. The Church speaks frequently on the importance of spiritual parenting.¹²³ The education of a child is first and foremost the duty of the child’s parents, and in a particular sense of that child’s mother.¹²⁴ Every woman who conceives and bears forth a child is called to also be a spiritual mother to that child. Indeed, “education,” Paola Bignardi defines, “is a special way of giving birth. Physical birth brings for new life, and education generates its meaning and growth in humanity. Education is spiritual generation.”¹²⁵

If this is the spiritual motherhood of the married woman, what then of the consecrated virgin, who does not experience the physical motherhood of the married woman? It has been stated that one cannot have spiritual motherhood apart from physical motherhood and vice versa. One cannot be truly absent from the other and the

¹¹⁹ Stein, *Woman*, 43

¹²⁰ *MD*, 18.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, *LF*, 9.

¹²² Castilla de Cortazar, ““So God Created Man in His Own Image,” 84.

¹²³ See for example, *Arcanum*, Encyclical, 26-29; *Casti Connubii*, Encyclical (hereafter *CC*), 13-15; *FC*, 6; *PT*, 17.

¹²⁴ *FC*, 6. *MD*, 19, Stein, *Woman*, 62, 78.

¹²⁵ Bignardi, “Women’s Responsibility and Participation in Building up the Church and Society,” 137.

lessening of one is always to the detriment of the other.¹²⁶ So, for the consecrated virgin, how do the physical and the spiritual aspects of motherhood marry together?

The chapter of *MD* that specifically expounds on the Christian concept of motherhood is, oddly enough, titled “Motherhood – Virginity.” Initially it would appear as though these two seemingly opposite states of being were placed together by Saint John Paul II as a means of collectively looking at motherhood and virginity as the two feminine vocations. However, upon reading the first subtitle of this chapter, one sees that this is not so. It reads: “Two dimensions of women’s vocation.”¹²⁷ Note here that “vocation” is singular, not plural, and that Saint John Paul II uses the term “dimension” and not “different.” What one can infer is thus that motherhood and virginity are not two distinct vocations but two distinct aspects of the one feminine vocation. This conclusion also makes sense of Saint John Paul II’s statement that, “In the teaching of Christ, *motherhood is connected with virginity, but also distinct from it.*”¹²⁸

Upon looking into the nature of spiritual motherhood, what must then be explored is if spiritual motherhood can be said to contain the two blessings that were just identified in biological motherhood - the blessing of cooperation with the Divine and participation in God’s plan of salvation, and the blessing of self-discovery. One sees the possibility and the fullness of this union between physical motherhood and spiritual motherhood in Mary – virgin and mother. Indeed, the first thing that one sees when turning to Mary as the exemplar of femininity, is the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of virginity and motherhood in the same person. In Mary, one learns that motherhood and virginity are not opposed to one another, but are inseparable.¹²⁹ For Mary, the motherhood of Christ, also involves her motherhood of His Body – the Church. Mary is physical and spiritual mother to Christ, but also spiritual mother to the Church. To the Church Christ said, “Behold your mother.”¹³⁰ When adopted by the heavenly Father, through His Son, humanity thus also receives an adoptive mother – Mary.¹³¹

¹²⁶ *MD*, 18.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, VI, ‘Motherhood-Virginity.’

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 20.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

¹³⁰ Jn 19:27

¹³¹ Gal 4:4-6. Cf. Rm 8:14-23; Gal 3:26. See also *RM*, 3.

Whilst the two Vocations of physical motherhood and spiritual motherhood are hence present in the person of Mary, one can also see from that, in the fullest sense, she was not both simultaneously. Her role as spiritual mother of the Church was only bestowed on her by her Son as He was about to die. The mother who has her own children is both physical as well as spiritual mother to them. But here Mary also presents that, in some way, there is a form of a spiritual motherhood of others that is distinct from the physical motherhood of one's own children.

Celibacy for the Kingdom

*The religious vocation is the total surrender of the whole person and his or her entire life to the service of God.*¹³²

Both Mary and Christ, through the living out of their vocations, validate and testify to consecrated virginity as a legitimate and fruitful Vocation.¹³³ What exactly does this then entail, and in what way is the spiritual motherhood that Saint John Paul II refers to in relation to consecrated virginity, different from the spiritual motherhood that is inseparable from physical motherhood?

Upon taking her vows, the consecrated virgin forgoes all possibilities of ever physically conceiving and giving birth.¹³⁴ “Nevertheless,” Saint John Paul II writes, “the renunciation of this kind of motherhood, a renunciation that can involve great sacrifice for a woman, makes possible a different kind of motherhood: motherhood ‘according to the Spirit’.”¹³⁵ The innate maternal characteristic is hence not eliminated by the Vocation to consecrated virginity, but is simply fulfilled differently. Just as the consecrated virgin does not relinquish her womanhood when she makes her vows, so too she does not lay down her vocation to motherhood. Whilst she does surrender the possibility of biological motherhood, she does not forsake that which is her nature, that which is a means of her discovering who she is. Her “no” to physical motherhood, is thus not a “no” to motherhood altogether, but a “yes” to the grace of spiritual motherhood. Yet, as aforementioned this motherhood cannot be said to be purely spiritual as no human person is only spiritual in nature.

¹³² Stein, *Woman*, 50.

¹³³ For more on the nature of spiritual motherhood and the religious life, see *MD*, Chapter VI.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, Cf. Rom 8:4.

It is for this reason that Saint John Paul II clearly states:

A woman is “married” either through the sacrament of marriage or spiritually through marriage to Christ. In both cases marriage signifies the “sincere gift of the person” of the bride to the groom. In this way, one can say that the profile of marriage is found spiritually in virginity. And does not physical motherhood also have to be a spiritual motherhood, in order to respond to the whole truth about the human being who is a unity of body and spirit? Thus there exist many reasons for discerning in these two different paths - the two different vocations of women - a profound complementarity, and even a profound union within a person's being.¹³⁶

Spiritual Mothers, Kingdom Builders

The ideal of virginity, as Saint John Paul II notes, is an ideal which clearly constitutes a New Testament innovation, but an innovation that has its roots in Old Testament tradition. The concept of remaining celibate in order to draw closer to God was not unheard of in the ancient Jewish tradition.¹³⁷ This practice seems to have also been linked to the coming of the Messiah and, is in fact said to have been more common in the years leading up the birth of Christ.¹³⁸ Nonetheless, Saint John Paul II affirms that, “celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, or rather virginity, is undeniably an innovation connected with the incarnation of God.”¹³⁹ Why is this important? Primarily for the fact that Christ, as the revelation of the redeemed human person to humanity, revealed the *imago Dei* as a celibate man born of a virginal woman.

This fact directly correlates to the maternal exclamation of Eve in Genesis: “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”¹⁴⁰ Beyond correlation, the conception of Christ is indeed the fullest expression and the fulfillment of Eve’s cry. In this sense, Eve’s words in Genesis 4 take on a prophetic note. In Jewish tradition, as Eve exhibits, it was believed that children were a direct gift from God. For Mary, this is most truly so. Without “knowing” her betrothed – Joseph - or any other man, in the Biblical sense of the term, Mary could not have conceived any other way than through Divine action.

¹³⁶ *MD*, 21 (emphasis omitted).

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 20. For some examples, see, Num 6:1-21; cf. Jer 16:1-4; Jgs 13:1-5; Lk 1:13-17. See also Rom 12:1-2; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:15.

¹³⁸ *MD*, 20.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁰ Gn 4:1.

“I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord,” thus becomes Mary’s cry too, and the response to her earlier question, “How can this be since I have no husband?”¹⁴¹

Whilst Israelite women had desired children for the perpetuation of God’s people on earth, Mary presents a motherhood that is focused entirely on the establishment of and devotion to the eschatological Kingdom - the New Israel.¹⁴² Whilst this eternal Kingdom was something hoped for but far off for Israelite women, through her *fiat* Mary reveals a way of living it in the here and now. “This divine motherhood, therefore, is an altogether unforeseen response to the human expectation of women in Israel: it comes to Mary as a gift from God himself.”¹⁴³ This is most readily seen in her motherhood of Christ who indeed bought the Kingdom of Heaven to humanity on earth, but most especially through her spiritual motherhood of the Church – the continuation of this Kingdom amidst humanity. Simply put, one can thus say that spiritual motherhood is essentially concerned with making the eternal manifest here on earth, primarily through the spiritual motherhood of the faithful.¹⁴⁴

So how then is this motherhood lived out, and what of the opinion that consecrated virginity is contrary to humanity’s nature?¹⁴⁵ As spoken of in the previous chapter, Christ and Mary as the exemplars of the restored and glorified male and female both testify to the naturalness, and hence the goodness, of consecrated virginity. In this sense, “virginity does not [and cannot be said to] deprive a woman of her prerogatives.”¹⁴⁶ This statement is merely an appropriation of Saint John Paul II’s and Saint Edith Stein’s earlier statements about grace, not destroying nature, but perfecting it, in specific relation to virginity. That which is innate in humanity’s nature cannot rightly be harmful to the human person. This must necessarily be so as humanity’s nature is something created and given by God Himself. Furthermore, humanity’s nature is in the image and likeness of the One who created it. Thus, as something revealed and graced by God Himself, contrary to current conceptions, virginity cannot be termed as harmful or opposed to who the human person is.

¹⁴¹ Lk 1:34.

¹⁴² *MD*, 20. Mt 6:10; cf. Is 9:7; Dan 4:3; 6:26; 7; Mt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; and so forth.

¹⁴³ *MD*, 20.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 20-21. How exactly this is so will be looked at shortly.

¹⁴⁵ Oh, “Motherhood in Christianity and Islam: Critiques, Realities, and Possibilities,” 639.

¹⁴⁶ *MD*, 21.

As Mary is able to live out the fullness of her femininity and find a confirmation of her dignity in living a virginal life for the Kingdom, the Gospels affirm consecrated virginity as an authentic Vocation for women.¹⁴⁷ Consecrated virginity is “a path,” Saint John Paul II writes, “on which they realise their womanhood in a way different from marriage.”¹⁴⁸ The foundation for this call, he adds, is found in two creational principles: firstly, that God created humanity for its own sake and, secondly, that created in the image of its communal Creator, the humanity of the human person is only realised when an individual makes a sincere gift of themselves. The consecrated virgin thus confirms her humanity by living fully as a creature created for her own sake and yet for the sake of another, gifting herself entirely to her Christ, her Groom. In doing so, she can realise the personal value of her femininity.¹⁴⁹

Because of the spousal union that takes place between the consecrated virgin and Christ, whilst some perceive virginity as a prudish “no” to love,¹⁵⁰ it is on the contrary a profound “yes” to Love, Himself.¹⁵¹ Virginity is hence marked by the characteristic of openness which, as earlier defined, is an essential characteristic of motherhood and femininity. “This is the evangelical ideal of virginity, in which both the dignity and the vocation of women are realized in a special way.”¹⁵² Woman’s complete openness to Christ her spouse, is a fruitful union, if not indeed the most fruitful union.

Just as the physical love of a married couple is manifest in the fruit of physical motherhood, so too the spousal love of the consecrated virgin thereby manifests itself as spiritual motherhood. As the wedded woman bears a “special readiness” and openness to new life, so to the spousal love of the consecrated virgin involves a “special readiness” on her behalf to be emptied out to every person who enters into her sphere of influence.¹⁵³ For the married woman, this maternal readiness is not limited or exclusive. Rather, it is focused first and foremost on those specifically placed by God into her care – her children. For the woman who is a virgin for the Kingdom, this

¹⁴⁷ *MD*, 20. For a full definition of the validity of the Vocation of consecrated virginity (for both men and women) see *ibid*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁰ Note here that, in this context “love” is loosely used as a generalisation for what is defined as “love” in the contemporary, secular context, namely two of the primary visible out workings of love: sexual intercourse and its fruit, children.

¹⁵¹ *Mulieris Dignitatem* speaks of this “yes” as “a profound “yes” in the spousal order: the gift of self for love in a total and undivided manner” (*ibid*). Cf. 1 Jn 4:7-9, 16.

¹⁵² *MD*, 20.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 21.

maternal readiness is focused first and foremost on the children of her Spouse, in other words, everybody.¹⁵⁴

Saint John Paul II notes that spiritual motherhood also manifests itself in various distinct forms.¹⁵⁵ The variety of forms that it can take on is due to the variety of personalities and gifts that each woman possesses, as well as the variety of needs of the people in need of spiritual motherhood. Spiritual motherhood, he writes, “can express itself as concern for people, especially the most needy: the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, children, young people, the imprisoned and, in general, people on the edges of society.”¹⁵⁶ She who is a virgin for the Kingdom tangibly loves her Spouse by loving His Body. The woman who is a virgin for the Kingdom consequently thus encounters a paradox of sorts: the person God calls her to pour her love out to in a form of self-gift is, all at once, her spiritual child as well as her Spouse.¹⁵⁷ For women who are virgins for the Kingdom, spiritual motherhood is thus a means by which they find their Spouse, who says, “As you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”¹⁵⁸

3.3.2.3. *Woman in the Professional World*

*This is your hour, Catholic women and Catholic girls. Public life needs you. . . . The fortunes of the family, the fortunes of human society, are at stake; and they are in your hands. Therefore every woman without exception is under an obligation—a strict obligation of conscience, mind you!—not to remain aloof; every woman must go into action, each in her own way, and join in stemming the tides which threaten to engulf the home, in fighting the doctrines which undermine its foundations, in preparing, organizing, and completing its restoration. . . . A wide field is opened to woman’s activity, an activity primarily intellectual or primarily practical, according to the capabilities and qualities of each individual.*¹⁵⁹

As aforementioned, Saint Edith Stein would say that there are three specific ways in which woman is able to live out her vocation of motherhood accorded to her by nature and grace. She can do such through: 1) marriage, 2) in the practice of a profession which upholds human growth as the highest professional pursuit of woman, or, 3) as

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 20.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 21.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. Most religious orders are hence typified by a particular charism or work mostly within a specific form of spiritual motherhood.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Mt 12:50. Cf. Mk 3:35.

¹⁵⁸ Mt 25:40.

¹⁵⁹ Pope Pius XII, *Women’s Duties in Social and Political Life*, (October 21, 1945).

a woman consecrated for the Lord.¹⁶⁰ Whilst the former and the latter are oft spoke about when it comes to woman being a mother, the second environment is typically glanced over. However, today it is in need of specific address as contemporary societies highly encourage women to pursue professional careers or, on the other hand, are making it necessary for women to work in order to provide for their families. In the general sense, neither is wrong, so whether woman should work or not work is not the issue here. The question at hand is: how ought woman balance her professional aspirations, whether born of desire or of necessity, with her vocation to motherhood.

In relation to this question, Saint John Paul II does not explicitly say much in *MD*.¹⁶¹ This almost seems slightly surprising given that the topic of the apostolic letter is the dignity and vocation of woman.¹⁶² Nonetheless, *MD* does provide the necessary foundation to begin speaking on the notion of women in the workplace. Upon this foundation of who woman is and what she was made for, will be applied the conclusions of Saint Edith Stein's work as she looks more specifically at women in the professional world.

The perception of motherhood as an obstacle to women's participation in the professional world and the more public functions of society has led to an incredible undervaluation of the vocation of motherhood.¹⁶³ Whilst in full blossom today, this line of thought had its roots in early feminism.¹⁶⁴ Writing in the 1940's, French existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, claimed in her works that the lives of woman have historically been shaped and limited by biologically determined roles, at the centre of which are of course pregnancy and child-rearing.¹⁶⁵ In its just attempt to liberate women from the domestic confines, gender feminism thus also contributed to the devaluation of motherhood, especially through the notion that motherhood can be placed on a scale beside professionalism, and have its worth measured by factors such as outward influence and personal gain.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Stein, *Woman*, 41-56.

¹⁶¹ Working women are mentioned in a word of thanks at the end of *Mulieris Dignitatem (MD)*, 31) but, other than that, there does not appear to be any specific reference made.

¹⁶² This is not to criticise Saint John Paul II's method in anyway but is merely an observational statement.

¹⁶³ Holness, "Motherhood and Spirituality: Faith Reflections from the Inside," 67.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Stein, *Woman*, 44. Note here that feminism is labeled merely as a contributing factor, not as the source.

As highlighted by Simone de Beauvoir, in response to the reduction of woman to her physical nature, radical feminists now tend towards the protestation that woman is not inclined to any particular profession, instead claiming that woman is well suited for any profession that she may so choose.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, strong opponents of gender feminists are only willing to concede that there exists but one vocation for woman - her natural vocation.¹⁶⁸ At the heart of their arguments, both extremes bear elements of the truth. However, in their zeal to defend woman against discrimination and injustice, their defence of particular aspects of femininity leads to the exclusion of other aspects.

Radical feminists are not wrong in their advocating the ability of woman to successfully fulfil various professions.¹⁶⁹ Their “progressive” advocating, however, does become digressive when it advocates woman’s capability apart from her femininity, implicitly arguing that feminine genius lies apart from her natural maternal tendencies. On the other hand, strong opponents of gender feminism are similarly not errant in their stressing that motherhood is woman’s natural vocation. However, what they then fail to realise is that this natural vocation can and, due to the individuality of each woman, ought to, manifest itself in a variety of ways in various spheres.

Any advocating of a group’s “rights”, be it men, women, children, or any other criteria for classification among humanity, to the detriment of another group, or even to the detriment of itself, is not in accord with humanity’s nature and God’s grace. On a basic level, it can be deemed inefficacious. Such is readily seen when looking at the ways in which the efforts to uphold and assert woman’s rights have gone from advocating for equal rights in the work place and in society to the masculinisation of women.¹⁷⁰ The detriment of living by the motto, “If you can’t beat them, join them”, is readily seen in the depreciation of femininity and its traits. What is more, when abiding by this sort of ideology, it is not just women who lose out, but society as a whole is worse because of it.¹⁷¹ This is so, not only for decreasing birth rates or poorly mothered children, but because humanity only prospers in accord God’s design - as male and female. If the

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 42.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 43.

¹⁶⁹ This thesis will look at woman in the professional world, but for more, see, *ibid*.

¹⁷⁰ Bignardi, “Women’s Responsibility and Participation in Building up the Church and Society,” 123. See also *MD*, 10.

¹⁷¹ Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 81-82.

masculine is upheld as the ideal for both sexes, then humanity is not truly humanity and humanity is at a loss, unable to reach its potential (hopping only on one leg, so to speak).¹⁷²

In light of the earlier chapters, one can readily say that any pursuit of woman's rights and equality between the sexes is thus inherently flawed if the feminine ideal pursued does not bear the image and likeness of God.¹⁷³ An ideal which pursues a concept of woman obscured and diminished by sin can never be anything other than false. It will always result in greater non-likeness, and thus a greater sense of longing and nonfulfilment. Consequently, women can pursue professional ambitions, but should do so as women, in accordance with the uniqueness of their femininity.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, as Saint Edith Stein writes, "God created humanity as man and woman, and He created them according to His own image. Only the purely developed masculine *and* feminine nature can yield the highest attainable likeness to God."¹⁷⁵

Accordingly, as can be clearly seen in the encouragements of Saint John Paul II and in the writings of Saint Edith Stein, Catholic anthropology is by no means opposed to the idea of women being educated or taking their place in the professional world.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, as one of those three aforementioned avenues by which woman can live out her vocation to motherhood, Saint Edith Stein urges that one must strive to acknowledge that every profession is, in and of itself, a vocation.¹⁷⁷ She then moves to say that entering into a profession should be a form of self-gift to the Lord. As Freda Mary Oben simply, but profoundly, writes: "Love hastens to give back to God our own gift – the gift of self as perfectly formed as He has given us to form."¹⁷⁸ Hand-in-hand with Saint John Paul II's teaching that the human person can only find themselves

¹⁷² See also, Gonzalez, "The Philosophical Notion of Equality," 161, who affirms: "The human race cannot perfect itself, it cannot even survive, without the existence of both male and female; perfection is a question of cooperation and complementarity, and not of competition and dissimilarity." As well as Janne Haaland Matlary who speaks on the nature of authentic equality (Matlary, "Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics," 341).

¹⁷³ *MD*, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Stein, *Woman*, 55.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 56. See also Freda Mary Oben and her summary of what Saint Edith Stein might say to the modern young woman, Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 79-85.

¹⁷⁶ *MD, LW*, Stein, *Woman*, 41-56, 246-60. On the Church's historical advocacy of female education, see, Matlary, "Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics", 339; and, Harrington, "*Woman*", 812.

¹⁷⁷ Stein, *Woman*, 42.

¹⁷⁸ Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 80.

through a sincere gift of self, the professional world is affirmed as a valid place for woman to live out her vocation.¹⁷⁹

Saint Edith Stein does not say that woman is restricted to which careers she can choose due to her “lesser capacity” as a female. On the contrary, she upholds that no woman is only woman. As a woman blessed with great intellect and desiring to employ it for the building of God’s Kingdom, she asks:

Are there feminine vocations other than the natural one? Only subjective delusion could deny that women are capable of practicing vocations other than that of spouse and mother... Indeed, no woman is only *woman*; like a man, each has her individual specialty and talent, and this talent can enable her to embark on any discipline, even those remote from the usual feminine vocations.¹⁸⁰

Just as with every person, whether male or female, each individual woman possesses her own unique personality and gifting,¹⁸¹ and is in fact capable of practicing any profession.¹⁸² It is for this reason that she writes: “Every profession in which woman's soul comes into its own and can be formed by woman's soul is an authentic woman's profession.¹⁸³ The innermost formative principle of woman's soul is the love which flows from the divine heart.”¹⁸⁴ Hence, to her rhetorical question, “Are we able to speak of vocations which are specifically feminine,”¹⁸⁵ Saint Edith Stein would answer in the affirmative, but, as will be seen, not in a restrictive sense.¹⁸⁶

Woman is characterized by her maternal nature. Indeed, as Freda Mary Oben writes: “It is woman’s spiritual motherliness which also provides her identity in the professional, public, and religious life. The woman is acutely needed in the marketplace for this very gift of ‘motherliness’.”¹⁸⁷ Flowing forth from her natural and primary vocation as spouse and mother, most of woman’s gifts manifest themselves in various forms of

¹⁷⁹ *LW*, 9-12.

¹⁸⁰ Stein, *Woman*, 49. See also, Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 71.

¹⁸¹ Stein, *Woman*, 49.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 47.

¹⁸³ *MD*, 10.

¹⁸⁴ Stein, *Woman*, 56.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁸⁶ She bases this conclusion that woman is physically and spiritually endowed for a very particular purpose (that of being spouse and mother) on the Thomist principle of *anima forma corporis*. For more, see, *ibid.*, 42-47. Here she also lists numerous traits particular to woman’s nature that are also, generally, not possessed by men in the same degree. As this thesis is addressing the topic of motherhood, however, mention of traits that are very specifically related to motherhood will be made.

¹⁸⁷ Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 71; *LW*, 11-12.

care and education of the human person.¹⁸⁸ Woman, Saint Edith Stein observes and concludes, thus naturally tends towards professions such as nursing, education, and other such professions that foster the personal physical or spiritual growth of others.¹⁸⁹

However, woman is not limited to these vocations. Drawing on Saint Edith Stein's work, Freda Mary Oben adds that, "wherever woman has incorporated her authentic feminine approach, no matter what profession – this becomes a legitimate female profession even if in the past it has only been a masculine occupation."¹⁹⁰ And, this thesis would offer that a significant part of this "authentic feminine approach" is motherhood. In line with their maternal vocation, and among many traits, woman necessarily brings the element of the personal and the human to the work place.¹⁹¹

Career vs. Motherhood?

*But always, the woman is to provide safe care for her children and never relinquish her primary role as mother or wife. Natural law dictates that her natural vocation is that of spouse, companion and mother.*¹⁹²

Herein the question ultimately lies: How ought one choose between pursuing a career and being a mother? And, if one chooses both, how ought they be combined? Underlying these questions is the reality that women often feel forced to choose between being a mother and the pursuit of a career.¹⁹³ A large part of the issue lies in the promotion of woman's place in the professional sphere over and above woman's natural maternal vocation. When faced with the decision of beginning a family or furthering her career, woman is pressured by society to choose the latter. When faced with the decision of staying home to care for one's children or returning to work as soon as possible, the latter is seen as a more pressing need. In some instances, the need for income is real as a means to provide for their family. But often, the perceived material and educational needs of the children and of the woman, as well as the desire for prestige, are placed above the necessary relational dimensions of motherhood.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Many of these traits were mentioned in earlier chapters.

¹⁸⁹ Stein, *Woman*, 44. See also, *LW*, 12.

¹⁹⁰ Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 84.

¹⁹¹ *LW*, 2.

¹⁹² Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 70.

¹⁹³ Matlary, "Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics," 340. *Familiaris Consortio* would move to say that the pressure placed upon women to choose between a family and a career is entirely unjust (*FC*, 23).

¹⁹⁴ *LF*, 8.

Instead, to be a mother is to provide as many “opportunities” and comforts for your child as possible, even if this means a life lived mostly in an office.¹⁹⁵

In a society where emphasis is placed on the “rights” of the individual, self-sacrifice is subsequently determined detrimental. Janne Haaland Matlary highlights that herein is where the problem lies. If society today places such emphasis on the acquisition of power and status, wherein does the profound call to service and self-gift, the heart of Christian life, and indeed the heart of motherhood, fit in?¹⁹⁶ The Catholic faith asserts that the human person is not an isolated reality. This was readily seen in the first chapter and was affirmed in the second when looking at the figures of Mary and Christ. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”¹⁹⁷ Revealed verbally by Christ in this simple statement and ultimately by Christ through His Passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, the human person finds themselves through a gift of their person. The human person was made for others.¹⁹⁸

In light of this, the Catholic process of individualisation sees human beings as the ultimate unit for moral concern. In other words, authentic individualism is the exemplification of Divine selflessness – self-gift. As the human person only realises their own personhood through an authentic gift of self, this withholding is entirely against its own individual concerns, not to mention the individual concerns of all others within his sphere of influence. To withhold the gift of self in an attempt to achieve individualisation, is thus actually a digression away from authentic individualism. Considering the aforementioned conceptions of Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein, perhaps this is especially so for woman who, as earlier mentioned, is reckoned as having an esteemed place in the order of love.

¹⁹⁵ Individualism has been an issue for some time it seems. Even in 1966, when writing on the issues of Marriage and virginity, Leonhard M. Weber refers to the impact of modern individualism on the family (Leonard M. Weber, *On Marriage, Sex and Virginity* (London: Burns & Oates LTD, 1966), 34). See also, Lugo, “The Rejection of Motherhood and Family,” 303.

¹⁹⁶ Matlary, “Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics,” 339.

¹⁹⁷ Jn 15:13.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Mother in the Office

*Woman's unique nature and intrinsic value are needed by the community. Her drive to develop all her faculties as intended by God, and to help others in the same way, holds great potential for the development of the present generation and for the future of the human race.*¹⁹⁹

For Saint Edith Stein, the question of woman's involvement in the professional sphere is not, "should woman be permitted to enter into a professional career and, if so, is she actually capable enough to do as apt a job as her male counterpart?" Rather, she would ask, "if a particular woman is called into a professional career, how can she best live out her feminine vocation in her professional life?"²⁰⁰ With all of this in mind, Saint Edith Stein then urges that every woman, "Whether she is a mother in the home or occupies a place in the limelight of public life, or lives behind quiet cloister walls, she must be a handmaid of the Lord everywhere."²⁰¹ This is the feminine vocation revealed earlier to be motherhood and spousal love, and exemplified in the person of Mary.²⁰²

A woman is more than capable of acquiring, maintaining, and succeeding in a professional career.²⁰³ As a unity, male and female operate in the image and likeness in which God created humanity in the beginning. Consequently, as a collaboration, their potential is far greater than the potential that either have in separation from the other. Woman thus enhances the work place through her unique feminine gifting, becoming a blessing for the entire society, private or public.²⁰⁴ Here one can see an obvious advocacy for women taking places in the professional world. However, Saint Edith Stein also makes a point of noting that woman's potential to be an invaluable blessing in the public and private spheres is contingent on her preservation of the feminine ethos.²⁰⁵ In other words, no level of success can alter the fact that woman's primary vocation is to motherhood and spousal love, and any career that she pursues must be in accord with this "specifically feminine ethos."

¹⁹⁹ Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 71.

²⁰⁰ This question is drawn from Saint Edith Stein's conclusions on who woman is, her vocation to motherhood, and the potential value she can bring into the professional world. For example, see, Stein, *Woman*, 49-50.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 52.

²⁰² Refer back to previous chapter.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 47.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 49. Here Saint Edith Stein uses the example of Mary at the Wedding of Cana as a Scriptural support for this conclusion. See also *PT*, 41.

²⁰⁵ Stein, *Woman*, 49. See also, *LW*, 10.

The vocation of motherhood does not negate woman's unique gifts and talents. It is not as if, on becoming pregnant, a woman must forsake all of the characteristics, dreams, and skills that makes her who she is. And, perhaps this is one of the areas in which society today is flawed in its perceptions of motherhood. When a woman discovers that she is pregnant with some degree of despondency, in many instances it is because she perceives motherhood as opposed to living as she pleases. At the heart of it, she is absolutely correct. To be a mother is not to live as you please but to live for another. Nonetheless, it is not a matter of motherhood verses living a "fulfilled" life. As detailed in the first chapter, God created and creates each individual person with purpose and intentionality. To suggest that God would create a woman with gifts and aspirations as a backup plan in case she does not have children or that He would engrain such things into her person, knowing that they could never actually be realised, would be contrary to this truth. There is no means by which one could reconcile this notion with the words of Christ: "I came that you may have life, life in abundance."²⁰⁶

The capacity of woman to love and nurture are not characteristics she possesses to help her be a mother, but characteristics she bears precisely because she was created to be a mother.²⁰⁷ To become a mother is thus not to waste the potential of a woman. To become a mother is to become a woman. Nonetheless, even in her admittance of the importance of woman's involvement in professional spheres, Saint Edith Stein also acknowledges that, "Many of the best woman are almost overwhelmed by the double burden of family duties and professional life."²⁰⁸ Her observation was made in the 1920's/30's, when women working full-time was not entirely common. Today, however, this observation seems applicable to the majority of women. Can a woman, then, successfully have both a career and a family of her own? Or, as Brenda Finlayson similarly asks, "In her role and mission in today's society, how then can a woman defend, protect, guard, transmit spousal and maternal love?"²⁰⁹

For the unmarried woman, her profession may be the means by which she can live out her vocation as mother. For the woman with her own children, however, her vocation is filled first and foremost through the nurture and education of those whom God has

²⁰⁶ Jn 10:10.

²⁰⁷ Matlary, "Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics," 339.

²⁰⁸ Stein, *Woman*, 53.

²⁰⁹ Finlayson, "Guardians of Spousal and Maternal Love," 386. The answer Brenda Finlayson provides to this query is one from *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

so directly entrusted to her.²¹⁰ In many instances, the pursuit of a professional career can frustrate and impede woman's primary vocation to be mother to her own children.²¹¹ In other words, woman can pursue a professional career, but when the career becomes the prime focus of a mother's time and attention, when the children suffer because of her job, the woman's priorities must be called into question. One could even ask how can she properly care for those who happen to enter her sphere of influence, if she cannot even look after to those who are uniquely entrusted to her?

With this in mind, whilst encouraging women to enter into professional vocations, if that is their calling, she also cautions the young mother to be at home with her infant.²¹² For the newly born child, the mother is irreplaceable, most especially in their formative years.²¹³ Even for the woman who is not so financially stretched that she is forced to return to work as soon as she is able to after giving birth, there exists a social pressure to return to work as soon as she is fit. Where traditionally woman was able to choose to remain full-time in the family, she is, in a sense, now forced to choose between family and work.²¹⁴

Woman's natural disposition, and indeed her calling, is to lay down her life in the service of others. In this sense, the pressure to work is not contrary to this vocation. Where things have become skewed is in the shift of importance. Naturally, as revealed by Saint John Paul II, the order should be the gift of self to family first, followed by society. The family is not a subsidiary of the state, but the state is dependent on the family.²¹⁵ The contemporary context, however, seems to have this truth flipped, where the greater good is measured purely by the quantity of people reached, and hence society takes first place.²¹⁶ And so, it is that Freda Mary Oben writes as a conclusion of Saint Edith Stein's work on professional women: "For the woman, motherhood is her primary role; that of ruler is secondary. And should she work, it is she who is now obligated to guard against the danger of loosened bonds with her children due to an over-zealousness for her career."²¹⁷

²¹⁰ Stein, 35; MD, 18.

²¹¹ Stein, 42.

²¹² Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 70.

²¹³ Freda Mary Oben, *Edith Stein: Scholar, Feminist, Saint* (New York: Alba House, 1988), 70-71.

²¹⁴ Matlary, "Men and Women in Family, Society, and Politics," 341.

²¹⁵ Ibid; MD, 29.

²¹⁶ This logic is, of course, ultimately unreasonable as society is based on the family, and hence, without solid family life, society crumbles.

²¹⁷ Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 71.

The Need for Subjective Objectivity

*Necessary emphasis should be placed on the “genius of women”, not only by considering the great and famous women of the past or present, but also those ordinary women who reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfil their deepest vocation.*²¹⁸

Taking into consideration the above points, if one were to suggest an antidote to the belittling of the importance of motherhood based on the Christian concept of motherhood, it would appear that it might take on one of two forms. Firstly, in a return to the acknowledgment of the objective value of the physicality and spirituality of the human person (as has been touched upon). Secondly, in the form of an anti-individualism, individualism here being the dominant, current notion of individualism.

As has been stated, in an especial way, woman has a unique and esteemed role in the order of selfless love. Indeed, “The maternal physiological factor,” Nicola and Danese state, “is an invitation to restrain selfishness, individualism, the making of unfulfilled promises and the delusion of omnipotence of the I.” They then go on to add, “The female procreative process contains - as inscribed in nature - paradigmatic meanings of the relationality of the person as such. Motherhood in particular exalts this anthropological dimension, through the pattern of unique relationship, two in one, that is established between mother and foetus.”²¹⁹

Accordingly, both Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein reveal authentic individualism to be an essentially communal individualism. If woman realised that she only finds her fulfillment in a sincere gift of herself, then the truly individualistic woman would live her life as a life laid down for others.²²⁰ Furthermore, if society returned to being authentically societal, about success as being the betterment of all as opposed to the success of a few to the detriment of the rest, then motherhood would perhaps be hailed as the greatest of all vocations.

²¹⁸ *LW*, 12.

²¹⁹ Danese and Di Nicola, “Woman and Man: Created One for the Other,” 101. See also Blanca Castilla De Cortazar who speaks of the knowledge of relationships through the phenomenological description of action that leads to being, and hence why motherhood varies from fatherhood (Castilla de Cortazar, “So God Created Man in His Own Image,” *Image of God He Created Them; Male and Female He Created Them*: Person, Nature, and Culture,” 80). Cf. *MD*, 8, 18.

²²⁰ *LW*, 12.

As woman is mother wherever she goes, there is hence no choice between whether she ought to live out her maternal vocation or pursue a career. She is always mother. To the woman who has glorious ambitions for her career, the self-gift of herself in motherhood may also involve the sacrificing of her aspirations to a certain extent or for a period of time. It is a joy for her to do so because the greater worth lies in the attentive care for the precious life growing inside of her.²²¹ Both Saint John Paul II and Saint Edith Stein, reveal that they have no qualms with the idea of woman pursuing a career; indeed, they encourage it. What they are against, however, is the placement of anything above the good of the human person. Hence, the woman who places the importance of her career above the importance of her own children is aberrant.²²²

To offer a viable answer to the question of how woman ought to approach the idea motherhood within the professional world, it thus seems that what is required is essentially what one might call a form of “subjective objectivity.” Objectively, as has been said, God created woman as a person distinct from man, characterised essentially by her maternal and virginal nature. Subjectively, or rather, on an individual level, each woman, as a distinct person, possesses propensities and proficiencies particular to her individual personhood.

When speaking of a need for subjective objectivity, what is meant, then, is a need for each woman to personally discern her vocation by taking into consideration her own individual giftings. For acknowledgment of these giftings should reveal to her the best way that she might live out her natural feminine vocation to be mother.²²³ Simply put, and as aforementioned, this involves woman asking of her vocation, not “what?” but, “how?” In doing so, priority is not given to the subjective, but neither is the subjective disregarded. Instead, the person is considered as a whole. This calls to mind what was discussed about Christ in the previous chapter. The intimate concern He had for women revealed the unique attention owing to every individual and the need for fostering their personhood on a personal level.

²²¹ Of course, it is often not the case that every mother is elated upon hearing the news that she is with child. In stating that it is a joy for woman to discover such, and even leave work for the purpose of rearing a child, this thesis is speaking idyllically, of how things are in the Redeemed order.

²²² Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 71.

²²³ See also, Harrington, “Woman,” 812.; and Oben, *The Life and Thought of St. Edith Stein*, 81.

As Saint Edith Stein so concludes her chapter on the ethos of women's professions:

For a wholesome collaboration of the sexes in professional life will be possible only if both achieve a calm and objective awareness of their nature and draw practical conclusions from it. God created humanity as man and woman, and He created both according to His own image. Only the purely developed masculine *and* feminine nature can yield the highest attainable likeness to God. Only in this fashion can there be brought the strongest interpenetration of all earthly and divine.²²⁴

Saint Edith Stein thus reveals that, not only must the subjective not be discarded, but indeed, it is only in authentic appropriation of one's individual nature and call that objective femininity can be realised. That every woman is called to express their feminine vocation/genius in various spheres of activity reveals the eternal genius of God. Again, this is most readily seen in the person of Mary. Mary's personal *fiat* to God's call for her life was ultimately a *fiat* to the manifestation of perfect femininity. In this sense, in the words of Jutta Burggraf, Mary reveals that, "Voluntary submission to the will of God is the secret that leads to the restoration of the disturbed order."²²⁵ Saint Edith Stein furthers this by adding that it is only in surrender to God that femininity can be restored and fully realised.²²⁶

For Saint Edith Stein, Mary indeed reveals that motherhood is a vocation written upon the heart of woman by God, and, therefore, her vocation to motherhood is one carried out for God's sake alone and under God's own guidance.²²⁷ For L. F. Cervantes and L. Harrington, this falls under woman's primary vocation as a sovereign human being - namely, to perfect herself with the aid of divine grace.²²⁸ It is hence also for this reason that Saint Edith Stein urges that woman must place herself before the holy sacraments, the sources of every grace. Most specifically, due to woman's esteemed place in the order of love, woman should partake of the Holy Eucharist, which she refers to as "the sacrament of love." She writes, "To have divine love as its inner form, a woman's life must be a Eucharistic life."²²⁹

²²⁴ Stein, *Woman*, 56. One can also readily see this notion upheld in the work of Kasper, "The Position of Woman as a Problem of Theological Anthropology," 61. See also *MD*, 7.

²²⁵ Burggraf, "The Mother of the Church and the Woman in the Church," 252.

²²⁶ Stein, *Woman*, 52.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 46.

²²⁸ Harrington, "Woman," 812.

²²⁹ Stein, *Woman*, 55.

3.4. Conclusion

Acceptance of the human person as a unity of body and soul attests that both are formed and placed together intentionally for a specific function. This purpose is ultimately to image Trinitarian Communion, but also has a particular purpose for the two sexes in which humanity was created – male and female. Scripture and experience testifies that woman’s design reveals she is made for the dual purpose of motherhood and spousal love. One can readily witness this truth even from a basic knowledge of woman’s physical structure as well as the interior inclinations of her person to bring forth and nurture life to all she meets. The principal nature of Eve and Mary’s motherhood also reveal this to be so. By virtue of her creation there is thus inherent goodness in physical motherhood as well as spiritual motherhood, neither of which can rightly be separated from each other.

Motherhood is thus not a something which reckons woman as inferior to man but is a profound blessing for woman by virtue of it being a means by which she both images her Creator as well as participates in God’s own creative nature. As woman is mother, motherhood is specifically connected to the personal dimension of the human vocation of self-gift and thus also of self-discovery.²³⁰ The woman who lives out her vocation to motherhood fully, therefore, bears the greatest likeness to God and is most fulfilled. Developing all her faculties as God intended, such a woman hence also bears the greatest possible influence on the society in which she lives. For woman to want to choose anything other than motherhood is consequently absurd.

Yet, even if the negative desire was there, woman cannot choose to not be mother, as someone cannot choose to do away with their nature. As much as a pine tree may desire to be a water lily, no amount of wishful thinking or attempts to alter appearance would enable it to change that which it is. The femininity of a woman who is not living out the fullness of her vocation to motherhood is hence not fully actualised. It is woman’s nature to be mother, so anything that obstructs or deprives this vocation must indeed be a result of the veil of sin.²³¹

²³⁰ *MD*, 18. Cf. Saint John Paul II, *RBSM*, 35-36.

²³¹ Hence, to avoid the pitfall of labeling one woman “less” or “more” woman than another, here, the appropriation of Saint John Paul II’s terminology may be most fitting. The womanhood of the woman who is not living out the fullness of her vocation to motherhood, is obscured and diminished.

How then is a woman to live out her vocation to motherhood? Much of the answer to this question is dependent on the individual disposition of the woman discerning. This answer may seem entirely unsatisfactory to the academic or to one seeking a definitive outline of who woman is or who she ought to be. However, the construction of such would be the construction of a false image of woman. One has seen the consequences of such constructions in the past - the ignorant, through their aspirations to conform themselves to such images, grievously suffer under them, and the vocal revolt against and spending every endeavour to tear them down. Indeed, the proposition of such images by individuals and/or by society is what has led to the misconceptions regarding femininity that are so prevalent today.

The need for a form of subjective objectivity is hence apparent. From what has been seen throughout this chapter, each woman is charged with the discernment of her own unique personhood. Only in doing so is she then able to gain insight into how she is called to live out her feminine vocation of motherhood. The resolution to the obscuration and diminishment of the image of motherhood is for women to willingly give their own *fiat* to the *imago Dei* in which they have been made, both as women and as individuals. In this sense, motherhood is thus not only the remedy to individualism through woman's gift of self to those placed under her care, but is primarily so because, in order for her to truly be mother, she must first gift herself to her Creator - the Source, Redeemer, and Perfector of femininity.

Conclusion

Overview

Confronted with conflicting ideologies and views about what motherhood is and what it is not, woman today is left uncertain as to the relevancy and blessedness of motherhood. Aware of this, the need for research into the nature of womanhood and the feminine genius were identified as both relevant and pressing. In order to look more particularly at the Christian concept of motherhood, this research deemed it most fitting to return to the two primary types of woman – Eve and Mary.

The intent of this thesis was thus to go beyond the variety of views of what motherhood is to the two primary female figures in Scripture to discern what they reveal about the Christian concept of motherhood. The ultimate purpose of disclosing what Eve and Mary reveal about motherhood, individually and collectively, was to establish the Christian concept of motherhood and then be able to bring that forward into the contemporary context. It aimed to do this in three main movements: first, by returning to the creation accounts to look at Eve as the first type of woman, to her creation, and to her Fall. Secondly, by turning to Mary to look at her as the redeemed type of woman, to her as the Mother of humanity's Redeemer, and to her Son and what He reveals about motherhood. And, lastly, by applying what Eve and Mary reveal about the Christian concept of motherhood into the contemporary context.

Overall, the two primary conclusions reached from looking at the Genesis creation accounts were: 1) that humanity (created as male and female) and the human person (created as both physical and spiritual) were deemed "very good" by God, and, 2) that humanity was created bearing the *imago Dei* (meaning that, being made for communion, the human person only finds themselves in a sincere gift of self). That the *imago Dei* is said to be in humanity without any explicit distinction given between male and female is the basis for being able to speak of the sexes as being equal in dignity. Yet, in order for humanity to bear the image of its Triune God, there must be more than one distinct person. Hence the *imago Dei* necessitates that male and female must be objectively different.

The existence of male and female is essential for the existence of humanity. The union of male and female is essential for each others self-discovery of their own humanity.

The body and biological sex are part of the absolute value and dignity of the person, and it is on these concepts that the models of maleness and femaleness should be based. It is on the basis of the different resources owing to the different sexes that men and women are able to understand their dignity and vocation and hence their fulfillment as persons. Such resources were received on the day that God created humanity as male and female in His own image and likeness. On this day woman inherited a unique expression of the *imago Dei* that is specifically feminine. It is motherhood that sets woman apart from man.

The Fall directly affected the *imago Dei* in humanity. Sin did not destroy the *imago Dei*, but it did obscure and diminish it. For woman, this obscuring and diminishment entailed the tendency of man to dominate her, as well as the existence of pain in childbirth. Woman's call to bear the *imago Dei* through her natural vocation to be spouse and mother was not obscured or diminished in any way by sin. This was proven when, after the Fall, Adam turned and named his wife "Eve," meaning, "mother of all living." Woman's vocation to motherhood is additionally affirmed and indeed exalted through the role of the "woman" in the first foretelling of humanity's Redemption – the *Protoevangelium*.

The *Protoevangelium* hinted that a woman somehow had an essential role to play in the work of redemption. In the *Protevangelium* the two greatest female figures of divine Revelation, Eve and Mary are brought together. This union of Eve as the mother of all living and of Mary as the Mother of Life Himself affirms dignity of woman, affirms motherhood as an essential part of womanhood, and absolutises the role of motherhood in salvation history. Motherhood was the means by which the New Covenant was established. Consequently, every time motherhood occurs throughout history, it is always directly linked to the New Covenant that God established through Mary's motherhood.

Mary's sinlessness and role as Mother of the Redeemer makes her the ultimate exemplar for all of humanity, but especially so, of all women. She is reckoned a reasonable exemplar for womanhood. In particular, she reveals that God inscribed on woman's heart the dual vocation of spousal love and motherhood. In relation to motherhood, she especially reveals these three fundamental truths: 1) as aforementioned, that woman and motherhood are inseparable, 2) that motherhood is

part of the redeemed order, and, 3) that motherhood is characterised by openness and selfless love.

The redemptive work of Christ in relation to femininity is concerned with the elucidation and reappropriation of what exactly it means to be female. His interactions with the women of the Gospels reveals and affirms the great dignity of woman. His union, first and foremost with His Mother, but also with the other women He encountered, restored the disordered union between male and female. The election of His Mother and His interactions with the women in the Gospels make apparent what the redeemed *imago Dei* in woman looks like. Furthermore, through the covenantal and maternal relationship of Christ with Mary, God redeems and ennobles motherhood.

Christ reveals what God's original design was for woman in the beginning. As a human person, woman is a unity of body and soul. As a person made in the *imago Dei*, woman's body and soul image her Creator in a particular way that man does not, namely, through her innate vocation to motherhood. Every woman is created to be a mother and, in accordance with her humanity, this motherhood is both physical as well as spiritual. By virtue of her creation there is thus inherent goodness in physical motherhood as well as spiritual motherhood, neither of which can rightly be separated from each other.

In being a mother, woman both images her Creator and participates in His own creative nature. As woman is mother, motherhood is specifically connected to the personal dimension of the human vocation of self-gift and thus also of self-discovery. The woman who embraces and lives out her vocation to motherhood in an intentional manner hence bears the greatest likeness to God, is closest to reaching her God-given potential, and is most fulfilled. There is hence, not just great merit for herself and for society for woman to be mother, but also great necessity for woman to live out her vocation to motherhood.

As a female, each woman is objectively created and called to be spouse and mother. As individual people, every woman has their own subjective way in which they are called to live out their vocation to be mother. It is thus necessary for her to discern her own personhood – her charisms, giftings, inclinations, etc. The woman who knows

herself is the woman who is most able to live out her vocation to motherhood in the fullest sense. Such a knowledge is revealed to her by her Creator. Thus, an openness and gift of self to Him is necessary for woman to know herself and therefore be able to truly give herself to others in motherhood.

So Where to From Here?

There are countless views, ideologies, and influencing factors to take into consideration when looking at what is impacting views of motherhood today. In order to overcome this obstacle, the issues addressed in this thesis were limited to those raised within the primary literature. Even then, there were still a number of issues to look at and thus the ones touched upon could only be done so in a manner perhaps too brief than the issues really demanded.

One of such issues this thesis was confronted with was the relevant need to address the reality of barrenness and its implications. Unable to deal with this enormous topic within the confines of this thesis, further study into the nature of barrenness, barrenness in Scripture, and the nature of spiritual motherhood would prove worthwhile. Due to the very personal and emotional nature of barrenness, perhaps even more invaluable would be the practical application of such studies into some form of pastoral resources that could be used by and for couples or individuals unable to have children.

Additionally, to conclude that the means of each woman living out her vocation to motherhood is subjective is necessary, but not sufficient. It cannot just be stated that each woman needs to discern how she is to be mother, for two reasons: 1) a clearer image of the exemplar of motherhood needs to be provided so that women have something real to aspire to,¹ and, 2) woman has no readily apparent means or method available for her to know how to go about this process of discernment.² Saint Edith

¹ Such an example would include an examination of what the other dimension of her feminine vocation entails – spousal love/virginity.

² As aforementioned, it is through her intimacy with Christ that woman discovers herself. Hence prayer and reception of the sacraments are known and presented as means of discernment. This thesis is not stating otherwise, but rather issuing that there does not seem to be a more specific method of discernment provided. For example, in receiving the sacraments, do women suddenly become aware of their feminine and individual vocations? Are there particular prayers to pray or methods of discernment that might be helpful? Is there anything in particular that women should be encouraged to examine within themselves? And so on.

Stein begins a discussion on the need to educate girls to perfect womanhood.³ This education, she furthers, is something needing to be provided first and foremost by the parents, but also by society through its various educational institutions. For a practical application of the Christian concept into the contemporary context, an in depth exploration into Saint Edith Stein's work on how to educate females to perfect womanhood would be invaluable. With her pedagogical work as a foundation, study could then be done into how to generate an efficacious system or programme for educating females to perfect womanhood.⁴

Furthermore, this thesis has concluded that a reappropriation of the true concept of motherhood, in some capacity, could be remedial for the predominant ideologies of individualism and dualism. Of course, both of these ideologies have been in existence for a lot longer than what this thesis refers to as "the contemporary context," and of course these ideologies are also vast in and of themselves, with all of their own variances and extremes. This thesis was barely able to touch on them, let alone address them comprehensively. What it did accomplish, however, was the establishment of a potential connection between individualism and dualism with the disparagement of motherhood, as well as the possibility that perhaps the rejection of said individualism and dualism as being connected with the exaltation of the Christian concept of motherhood. Further study into the possibility of this connection and of motherhood as a conceivable remedy for individualism and dualism could prove both interesting and advantageous.

³ Again, and in line with this thesis, this 'perfect womanhood' is not some glamourised or unrealistic image of woman that would be imposed upon females as, let us say, a cookie cutter on a batch of dough. But it would be something along the lines of a presentation of who woman is, what her two natural vocations are, the blessing of femininity, and some means of drawing out the individual potential of each person so as to help them realise the fullness of who God created them to be.

⁴ In the Catholic setting, this could be something applicable in perhaps a school or parish setting.

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