

RENEWAL OR REPATRIARCHALIZATION? RESPONSES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TO THE FEMINIZATION OF RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

This article will outline a feminist interpretation for responses of the Roman Catholic Church to particular events in modern history, and sketch feminist proposals for solving the resulting problems of the Church today. The first section interprets the Church's initial response to scientific and philosophic discoveries and movements of the late Renaissance and the Enlightenment period as responsible for the feminization of the image of Roman Catholicism in the secular mind. The second section interprets the Church's response to liberalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as confirming for the secular, and increasingly popular, mind this feminine image of Catholicism. The third section depicts Vatican II as a contemporary attempt to create a more masculine image for the faith by moving the Church's sphere of action from the feminized private sector to the public world characterized by masculine rationality and technology. The final section sketches some ways in which modern feminist scholarship and its perspective can be a major and necessary contributor to the eradication of this feminine view of religion through the elimination of public/private dualism.

1. The Rationalist Attack on the Church: Its Response

In the western world since Hellenic times, rationality has been considered essentially masculine, that is, characteristic of males.¹ Rationality was understood as the ground of truth and virtue, for only through reason could one discover what was good and true and then abide by it. Order and civilization were similarly understood as dependent upon rationality and so were also masculine. Rationality was supreme, but irrationality was recognized as indirectly necessary for society, for women were understood as irrational but essential for procreation. Woman's purpose was seen as limited to procreation which did not require, and to some extent, excluded, rationality; so specially designed for their carnal purpose were women's bodies that they had proportion-

¹Short surveys of patristic and medieval attitudes toward and understandings of women can be found in Rosemary Ruether, "Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church" and Eleanor McLaughlin, "Women in Medieval Theology" in Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

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ally less capacity for other, especially non-carnal, tasks. Thus, women were not understood to have public functions; their role was a domestic one. Women and their domestic realm were characterized by irrationality, emotionality, and intuition.

Christianity understood itself to be both rational and spiritual, as would be expected considering the strong influence of Hellenic culture throughout the Roman Empire. But beginning in the sixteenth century the common understanding of rationality began to shift due to scientific discoveries. Discoveries in astronomy, and later in biology, genetics, evolution and chemistry, challenged the more primitive understandings of the Scholastics regarding the structures of the physical world, understandings which had become a respected part of Church teaching. The problem for the Church arose from the growing identification in the European mind of scientific method with reason. Beginning with Galileo's case and continuing through Pius XII's condemnation of evolutionary polygenism in *Humani generis*, the Church disavowed many of the discoveries of science.² Thus, to the extent that science embodied reason for many Europeans, it was commonly believed that the Church could no longer make the claim that faith, hence religion itself, was rational. This problem became more and more acute for the Church as the discoveries and prestige of science increased through the centuries. That is not to say that the perceived opposition between science and religion was accurate, or that the newer understanding of rationality was superior to that with which the Church was accustomed to reflect. But it is important that proponents and adherents of the secular culture beginning in Europe came to see faith as irrational—that is, not capable of scientific proof—because a side effect of this belief was that within the battle between religion and secularism religion acquired a more feminine image and thereby lost status.

The trend begun by the scientific revolution continued as the new approach toward and understanding of rationality as critical rationality was developed by Enlightenment thinkers into political philosophy. If rationality could dissect and understand the physical world, then why could it not direct societies, making social and political decisions? Human nature came to be understood almost completely in terms of rationality, and from thence it was a short step to see human beings as responsible for constructing the society which their rationality could envision. This view was opposed by the Church much more strongly than the discoveries of science had ever been, not because the Church denied the existence or usefulness of reason, but because it did not regard reason alone as sufficient for the discovery of the religious and moral truth which should be reflected in society. Thus the *Syllabus of*

²Kenneth Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Vol. II (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 692-93, 982-87.

Errors, issued in 1864 by Pope Pius IX, not only condemned the ideas that the truths of religion are derived from reason, that human reason is the sole judge of truth and falsehood, that faith contradicts reason, and that Christian dogmas can be arrived at through reason alone, but went on to attack the idea of the civil power deriving its authority from the support of rational human beings. The *Syllabus* insisted that the survival of religious and moral truth in society required that Church and state not be separated, that other religions not be recognized by the state, and that civil powers not regulate education, marriage or church offices.³ Six years later the first Vatican Council affirmed that while reason confirmed and did not contradict faith, it was not sufficient for faith.

This position was not well understood. When added to the Church's political alignment against the French Revolution and national democratic movements such as Italian unification, this position on the insufficiency of reason suggested to many outside the Church that the Church accepted the view that religion and human beings were both irrational. For purposes of history, what was believed to be said was perhaps more significant than what was actually said.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Church had suffered a stunning series of losses and crises: the loss of Church members and property engendered by the Reformation, the French Revolution and its resulting anticlericalism, the spread of democratic liberalism and socialism, the loss of the Papal States, and not least, the hostile intellectual climate of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment. The Church's responses to these crises was the standard response of institutions to crisis, one which might be characterized today as macho: it tightened its belt, lifted its chin, and stepped forth fighting. Specifically, it accelerated the historical trend to centralize authority at the top, demanded increased loyalty and obedience from the ranks, and vociferously attacked its enemies, both internal and external. It is important to note that this response was not just a papal response; it was supported by the majority of the hierarchy and stirred no mutiny in the ranks of the laity, due to a common perception of the crisis.

Examples of this reaction are clear. Centralization of authority in the Vatican is perhaps best illustrated by Vatican I, which asserted the supremacy of the pope over the Church and papal infallibility in defining faith and morals. The power of bishops over the laity was increased through Church pronouncements such as that of Pius X in 1911 which gave bishops complete authority over all Catholic organizations; Pius XI and Pius XII continued to assert episcopal control over all forms of Catholic Action.⁴ Doctrinal loyalty and obedience were mandated dur-

³*Ibid.*, pp. 1099-1101.

⁴Latourette, p. 1105; *Chers fils*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42 (1950), 639; *De quelle consolation*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 43 (1951), 784; *Se a tempere*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 32 (1940), 362; *Divini Redemptoris*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 29 (1937), 100.

ing the Modernist controversy under Pius X and Cardinal Merry del Val: a 1907 encyclical, *Pascendi gregis*, and a decree, *Lamentabili*, condemned the modernists and then ordered all teaching or pastoral clergy to take a strict anti-Modernist oath. It was thus made clear that orthodoxy would be enforced, and that questioning or innovative thinking in theology or Biblical studies would be discouraged.

The effect of this ecclesial response was to further feminize religion's image in the eyes of its opponents and thus to allow them a powerful weapon in the battle for the popular mind. All of the attempts to make the Church a strong instrument wielded by the hierarchy in the modern world drained the ranks of the laity of any independence of either thought or act and of any participation save unquestioning obedience. The Church's response to its series of crises was to make loyalty to the institutional Church the litmus test of Christianity, and to evaluate that loyalty in terms of exclusivity and obedience. The Church hierarchy continued to be viewed as masculine in secular culture due to its authoritarianism and political machinations. But the image of the Church member which emerged as a result of this emphasis was one characterized not only by a lack of rationality, but also by subservience, thus augmenting the femininity of the image. Thus the body of the Church appeared much more feminine as a result of the Church's attempt to create a more masculine image through authoritarianism.

II. *The Church Further Confirms Religion as Feminine*

The Church unwittingly contributed even further to religion's feminine image through its teachings in two ways. First, as the Church lost ground to liberalism in attempting to retain its former niche in the world, it shifted the grounds of religion's defense from the public political sphere to the private domestic sphere. This reinforced religion's feminine image by suggesting that there was indeed a special connection between religion and the feminine domestic sphere. Second, by the twentieth century, the Church couched its arguments in defense of the traditional sexual division of labor in the Victorian language of the pedestal. While the language of sexual complementarity had long been standard within the Church and society, two distinctive changes are noticeable in Church teaching in the twentieth century. We begin to find references to the religious and moral superiority of women over men (impossible earlier when virtue and faith had been linked to reason). And the masculine world of rationality, efficiency, technology and self-interest comes to be portrayed in very negative, depressing terms as a harsh, mechanistic, and unloving world.

In its depiction of women as naturally religious and moral, the home as the font of religion in the world, and the world and the home as in some ways opposed to each other, the Church affirmed the very charges

it had combatted for centuries—that religion is primarily a private occupation for irrational creatures, divorced from the reality of social and political life. The twentieth century Church did not entirely capitulate to this view. However, it became very difficult for the Church to effectively combat the forces attempting to cast religion as socially and politically irrelevant when the Church in parts of its own teaching seemed to view religion as a domestic matter natural only for women.

A. *The Retreat to Marriage and the Family.* The Church's emphasis on a defense of marriage, family and parental rights was dictated by the political climate in which the Church was confronted with liberal governments not open to Church views on political questions. These liberal governments were the heirs of the secular culture with which the Church had repeatedly clashed in the past. The Church's interest in marriage was not new; it had historically addressed the issue. But beginning with the French Revolution a two-step shift occurred in Church teaching on marriage. Before this time Church pronouncements on marriage focused on either isolated cases of judges in Church courts too readily granting marital nullity,⁵ laxity in granting dispensations for degrees of affinity and consanguinity,⁶ clerical laxity in requiring proper form in marriages,⁷ or laxity in allowing mixed marriages.⁸ In the first step of the shift soon after the French Revolution, the Church attempted to defeat civil attempts to wrest control of marriage from the Church. Beginning with the condemnation of the Jansenist ideas that the civil power can regulate a betrothal and establish diriment impediments to marriage,⁹ the Church issued a constant stream of documents denying that the civil power can regulate marriage, witness it, restrict some from entering it, or nullify it on any grounds.¹⁰ The second step to the shift

⁵*Encyclical Matrimonii*, 1741 to Polish bishops; letter *Deessemus Nos*, 1788 to the Bishop of Mottola; Apostolic Constitution, *Dei miseratione*, 1741; Apostolic Constitution, *Apostolicii ministerii*, 1747. Sources of translations of papal documents not otherwise identified: *Papal Teachings: Matrimony*, ed. Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, tr. Michael J. Byrnes (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1963); *Papal Teachings: Woman in the Modern World*, ed. Benedictine Monks of Solesmes (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1958).

⁶Apostolic Constitution, *Ad Apostolica servitutis*, 1742.

⁷Encyclical *Satis vobis*, 1741; encyclical *inter omnigenas*, 1743 to the Bishop and people of Serbia.

⁸Encyclical *Magnae nobis*, 1748 to Polish Bishops; Apostolic letter *Quantopere*, 1763; letter to Archbishop of Malines, *Exequendo nunc*, 1782; letter, *Gravissimam*, 1789 to Archbishop of Prague; letter, *Litteris tuis*, 1789 to Bishop of Agra.

⁹Apostolic Constitution, *Auctorem fidei*, 1794.

¹⁰Letter, *Etsi fraternitatis*, 1803 to Bishop of Mainz; encyclical *Traditi humilitati*, 1829; encyclical *Commisum divinitus*, 1835 to clergy of Switzerland; Apostolic letter, *Ad Apostolicae Sedis*, 1851; letter, *La littera*, 1852 to King Victor Emmanuel; *Consistorial allocution September 27, 1852 on civil matrimony in New Granada*; the *Syllabus of Errors #65-74*; letter *Tuae litterae*, 1875 to Bishop of Ghent; encyclical *Inscrutabili*, 1878; encyclical *Quod apostolici*, 1878; letter *Ci siamo*, 1879 to episcopate of Turin, Vercelli, and Genoa; encyclical *Arcanum*, 1880; letter *Les evenements*, 1883 to President of French Republic; encyclical *Humanum genus*, 1884; encyclical *Quod multum*, 1886 to Bishops of Hungary; encyclical *Dall'alto*, 1890 to Italian episcopate; encyclical *Rerum novarum*, 1891; letter *Il divisamento*, 1893 to Italian episcopate; letter *Quam religiosa*, 1898 to Bishops of

occurred in the 1930's, when papal documents on marriage began to focus less on the presumption of civil regulations on marriage.¹¹

The significance of the shift was that the Church moved from a demand that the state respect the Church's right to regulate marriage to a demand that the state, in regulating marriage, respect the rights of individuals involved in marriage and family life.¹² This latter line of teaching, begun by Pius XI and Pius XII, continued and was expanded in the teaching of John XXIII and Paul VI and is still strong today.¹³ Since the above shift in the 30's, the Church came to see both the family as the basic social unit which underpinned the stability and determined the character of society, as well as the Church as the defender of the family, guiding society through the family.

One of the effects of this concentration on marriage, sexuality and parental rights in the education of children was to convey the idea to many Catholics that religion was essentially a domestic affair, and to confirm the suspicions of anticlerical liberals. Even within the Church, many persons came to understand their faith solely in terms of contracting marriages according to canon law, attending Sunday Mass, abstaining from adultery, contraception, and abortion, and raising children who received a Catholic education. Likewise, many both within and without the Church came to see societies as "Christian" if they allowed the free exercise of the sacraments and the establishment of Catholic schools, and as "Catholic" if they also prohibited divorce, abortion, sterilization or other forms of contraception. This is not to say that the Church did not develop social teaching in other areas, especially in economic affairs. But the social teaching in other areas did not permeate the consciousness of ordinary Catholics, much less that of non-Catholics, to the extent of the teaching on marriage and family. The Catholic masses were much more likely to know of the warnings against

Peru; encyclical *Annum ingressi sumus*, 1902; letter *Dum multa*, 1902 to Bishops of Ecuador; letter *Afflictum propioribus*, 1906 to Bishops of Bolivia; encyclical *Ubi arcano*, 1922; letter *Ci si e domandato*, 1929 to Cardinal Gaspari.

¹¹Encyclical *Casti connubii*, 1930; *Dilectissima nobis*, 1933, to Spanish episcopate; encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, 1937; Apostolic letter *Con singular complacencia*, 1939 to Phillippine episcopate.

¹²*Casti connubii*, 1930; encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, 1939; 1941 allocution to Sacred Roman Rota; Radio Message to the World, May 13, 1943; allocution to Biological-Medical Union of St. Luke, 1944; allocution to French journalists, April 17, 1946; radio message to Swiss people, 1946; allocution to Congress on European Unity, 1948; allocution to Bureau International du Travail, 1949; speech to International Union of Family Organizations, 1949; speech to International Congress of Catholic Doctors, 1949; speech to Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, November 2, 1950; speech to Fathers of Families, 1951; speech to midwives, 1951; speech to Association of Large Families, 1951; allocution to First Symposium on Genetic Medicine, 1953; speech to 26th Congress on Urology, 1953; speech to 2nd World Conference on Fertility and Sterility, 1956; allocution to 7th Congress on Hematology, 1958.

¹³John in *Mater et Magistra*, #188-195; Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, #17,23; John Paul II in January 28, 1979 address at Puebla, III, 5.

public education, mixed marriage, divorce, artificial contraception and abortion than to have heard of the just wage and the principle of subsidiarity. The clergy was much more likely to know of and preach on the former than the latter. Moreover, the Church was much more likely to exert pressure, both diplomatic and political, on societies trespassing on the marriage and family teachings than on those engaged in massive offensive armaments buildups or those in which workers were not adequately housed or fed, or in which other human rights were violated. A major reason for this state of affairs was that Church pronouncements on social, as opposed to domestic matters, were addressed to a different audience. The Church aimed the social teaching very explicitly at the right and powerful whom it considered able to affect social problems, not at the laity who filled the pews at Sunday Mass. The laity learned Church teachings on subjects in which they were considered responsible for action—Mass attendance, religious education of children, sacramental marriage, birth control. The teaching on non-domestic subjects fell into a void—the laity never heard them, and the powerful paid them no heed. The social teaching of the Church has been the province of scholars and bureaucrats alone. It was, and is, no wonder that religion has been considered by many as irrelevant to public affairs, but as important only within the personal domestic circle.

B. *Direct Confirmation of Religion as Feminine.* The papal teaching on men and women, their differences and roles, provides more support for those who associate religion with feminine domestic concerns rather than with the masculine world of work and government. Within the context of this teaching, the popes of the twentieth century have described women in stereotypic ways, and the home as the realm of women. Furthermore, they have depicted men's realm as one lacking not only the Christian virtues, but even humaneness.

Leo XIII, who was pope until 1903, built the foundation for much of twentieth century social teaching in the area of sexuality and marriage just as he did in economics and Church-state relations. Leo described man both as provider of maintenance, health and education for the family¹⁴ and as the authority over the dependent submissive wife.¹⁵ Man was the provider because he, through his work, engaged in the public world. In this public world he represented Christ in the marital analogy of Christ and the Church because woman was, according to Genesis, derived from and dependent upon man, just as the Church derived from and is dependent upon Christ. With Benedict XV, the Victorian rhetoric became stronger. He described woman as the "soul of society," the superior spiritual and moral force, and the social source of religion.¹⁶

¹⁴*Immortale Dei*, 1885, *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, 18:167-68.

¹⁵*Arcanum*, 1880, *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 12:389.

¹⁶*Natalis trecentesimo*, December 27, 1917, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 10 (1918), 57.

Women, he said, are the binding force of the home and are naturally home-centered: "In the home she is queen, and even when she is far away from home, like a wise governor, her maternal affection and all of her thoughts must be centered therein. . . ." ¹⁷ Moreover, in keeping with the stereotype, Benedict did not think that women were rationally capable of sound decision-making; they needed the "watchful care" of fathers and husbands to keep them from evil. ¹⁸ and were both unconscious and ultimately ignorant of the evil within their power. ¹⁹

Pius XI's marriage encyclical, *Casti connubii*, 1930, describes the "order of love" which must reign in the home as implying "the primacy of husband over wife and children and the ready submission and willing obedience of the wife." In an attack on the emancipation of women in the same encyclical, Pius defended the inequality of the sexes as necessary for the "welfare of the family" and "the unity and ordered stability which must reign in the home." ²⁰ Furthermore, Pius paints the public world as a jungle; he echoes Leo XIII's *Arcanum* when he says that:

If she [woman] abdicates the royal throne upon which the Gospel has set her in the home, to follow her own bent, and engage in business and even in public affairs, she will soon find herself reduced, in reality if not in appearance, to the slavery of ancient days, and will become what she was among the heathen, nothing more than the tool of her husband. ²¹

The same argument was used not only by Leo and Pius XI, but also by Pius XII. ²²

In Pius XI's 1937 condemnation of communism, *Divini Redemptoris*, the question of the proper sphere of women arose. Pius condemned communism because, among other things, it was

characterized by the rejection of any link that binds women to the family and the home, and her emancipation from the tutorship of man is proclaimed as a basic principle. She is withdrawn from the home and the care of the children, to be thrust, instead, into public life and collective production under the same condition as man. ²³

The contrast drawn between the domestic and the public spheres is startling. Christian teaching has been effective in the home, where woman is accorded respect and protection because of the Gospel; but Christian teaching has been so ineffective in the public world of male production that women risk slavery upon entering it.

¹⁷October 21, 1919 speech.

¹⁸*Bonum sane*, June 25, 1920.

¹⁹October 21, 1919 speech.

²⁰*Casti Connubii*, 1930.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²September 10, 1941 speech to newlyweds.

²³*Divini Redemptoris*, 1937.

Pius XII concurred with the view of Pius XI that thrusting women into public affairs was detrimental both to women and to the domestic scene. At the same time he saw that because of the imbalance in the numbers of men and women following World War II many women were forced to work to support themselves. Also, he felt that the greater religiosity of women could be beneficial to the Church and to the moral tone of society in general if women took a more active, but still limited, role in public affairs.

Pius XII described women in terms of extreme sensibility,²⁴ natural piety and innate abhorrence of war,²⁵ naivete and a lack of discernment.²⁶ Here again is the link between piety and a lack of rationality. Woman is good but needs to be protected because she does not comprehend real dangers: "The illusion of solidity and strength, the illusion of experience and prudence, both of them nourish a presumption to which her nature, even if well trained, is only too prone."²⁷

Pius XII's thought becomes clearest when one looks at his speeches on working women. He understood the domestic hearth as a refuge, a place of religion, compassion and nurturance, in the midst of a hostile world. Women were the creators and caretakers of these refuges; their job was to humanize their husbands and children, to support the victims of the harsh public world. Thus Pius said:

Both sexes have the right and the duty to work together for the good of society, for the good of the nation. But it is clear that while man by temperament is more suited to deal with external affairs and public business, generally speaking the woman has a deeper insight for understanding the delicate problems of domestic and family life, and a surer touch in solving them. . . . The sensibility and delicacy which are so characteristic of the woman may perhaps bias her judgements in the direction of her impressions, and so tend to the prejudice of wide and clear vision, cool decision or farsighted prudence; but on the other hand they are most valuable aids in discerning the needs, aspirations and dangers proper to the sphere of domestic life, public assistance, and religion.²⁸

Here again the religious-domestic/rationalized-public split in reality is explicit.

Perhaps Pius XII's most explicit speech on the private/public split and the sexes was a 1942 speech in which he said:

. . . the truth is that it is the woman who must mold and nourish the family hearth, and that in this, her place can never be taken by her

²⁴ October 21, 1945 address to Italian Women.

²⁵ October 24, 1955 speech to Italian Education Association.

²⁶ September 21, 1948 speech to International Association for the Protection of the Girl.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ October 21, 1945 address to Italian women.

husband. . . . [T]he material fireside is not enough to form the spiritual edifice of happiness. . . . Who will create then, little by little, day by day, the true spiritual fireside, if not the action par excellence of her who has become a 'housewife,' of her to whom the heart of her husband trusts? Whether her husband be a laborer or a farmer, professional or literary man, scientist or artist or clerk or official, it is inevitable that his work will carry him for the most part outside the home. Or if in the home, it will confine him for long hours in his study, out of the current of family life. For him, the family hearth will become the place where, at the end of his working day, he will restore his physical and moral powers in rest, peace and intimate enjoyment.²⁹

In Pius' mind, the world is clearly not a humane place. He concentrated a great deal of energy in teaching the proper role of women because he saw modern trends in women's roles threatening the refuge of the home, and thereby morality and religion. No longer were rationality and religion allied in the papal mind. Rationality characterized both men, who make "cool decisions" with "clear vision," and the masculine world of public affairs. The seat of religion, on the other hand, was the feminine world of the domestic hearth. Religion was a central concern of women by virtue of both nature and role; women were the natural caretakers of religion in the world. Rationality's sole religious task in this framework is to see that women are kept in the home or other domestic refuges in order that they not be corrupted and their necessary gifts of moral and spiritual maintenance thereby lost to the world.

John XXIII concurred in this vision, and completed the picture of the public world as unhealthy when he urged women who feel they must work not to neglect their duties to the domestic refuge:

Everyone knows that outside work, as you might naturally expect, makes a person tired, and may even dull the personality; sometimes it is humiliating and mortifying besides. When a man comes back to his home after being away for long hours and sometimes after having completely spent his energies, is he going to find in it a refuge and a source for restoring his energies and the reward that will make up for the dry, mechanical nature of the things that have surrounded him?

Here again, there is a great task waiting for women: let them promise themselves that they will not let their contacts with the harsh realities of outside work dry up the richness of their inner life, the resources of their sensitivity, of their open and delicate spirit; that they will not forget those spiritual values that are the only defense of their nobility; last of all that they will not fail to go to the fountains of prayer and sacramental life for the strength to maintain themselves on a level with their matchless mission.³⁰

²⁹February 25, 1942 speech to newlyweds.

³⁰*Ci e gradito, Osservatore Romano*, December 8, 1960.

Since John, we do not have such clear papal statements on the split between public and private world, though the sexes are still understood in terms of complementarity. Church authorities still see the world divided into two spheres, one masculine, the other feminine.

III. Vatican II and the Feminization of Religion

The changes wrought in the Church since Vatican II have been aimed, I suggest, at moving the Church from the feminine, private side of the public/private split to the masculine public side. Pope John XXIII in calling the Council was not constrained by any significant internal crisis. Rather he said he called the Council to examine the modern world outside the Church in order that the Church be better able to serve the world.³¹ This was perhaps nowhere clearer than in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, parts of which read today as if written by European political theologians attacking privatization:

Therefore let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation. Christians should rather rejoice that they can follow the example of Christ, who worked as a artisan. In the exercise of all their earthly activities, they can thereby gather their humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory.³²

The move toward the public sector has caused crisis in both spheres. The authorities in the public sphere resent the intrusion of what they regard as a feminine, domestic, irrational private life concern (religion) into their realm through pronouncements on poverty, human rights, disarmament, land use, energy, racism and other issues. At the same time they recognize that papal and episcopal figures are not easily dismissed as softhearted, unrealistic, feminine and naive. After all, these figures function as a rationalized masculine authoritarian elite presiding over a feminized (because subordinated) mass membership. The public storm over the hierarchy's attempt to jump the Church over the public/private barrier therefore centers on the question of the appropriateness of mixing soft sentimental religion with practical, technical, self-interested politics, rather than on the ability of religious leaders to function in leadership roles in the public realm.

³¹Thomas Shannon and David O'Brien, "Introduction to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" in *Renewing the Earth: Catholic Documents on Peace, Justice and Liberation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 171-72.

³²*Gaudium et Spes*, 43 in Joseph Gremillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976), p. 278.

The crisis within the Church over the hierarchy's attempt to scale the public/private fence since Vatican II is relatively rare in Church history, and not well examined from this perspective. The attempt of the hierarchy to restore to the Church the public role it lost in the modern world creates crisis because neither hierarchy nor laity really understand their roles and situation. They are divided. There are those who hope to regain for the Church the same public role it lost at the hands of Enlightenment liberalism; they fail to understand, however, that liberalism not only transformed the Church's place in the world, but also transformed the world. These persons do not see that though the Church can move with some difficulty into the public realm, it must act a role different from any it has held in the past. This different role requires certain internal changes.

The majority of the hierarchy, and many laity, are more aware that the new role of the Church in the public sphere is dependent upon the Church's ability to internally transform its own functioning. The hierarchy can neither rule the laity and the world, nor manipulate the world through commands to its lay troops.³³ Even if the troops are willing to be commanded such action is rejected by the public sphere as characteristic of dangerous fanatical organizations. The public sphere now demands evidence of critical rationality as the basis of corporate action. The public sphere begins to demand that the Church take a consistent stand on issues such as critical reason, the human person, individual freedom, and responsible authority. The Church has only lived up to Vatican II goals in a very limited way. The Church as an *institution* has made a strong claim to a place in the public world. But the Church as a *community of persons* has not done the synthesis of public and private, social and religious called for by the Council. In fact, much of the Church community reacts to the hierarchy's attempts to interest it in the public world with not only disinterest but suspicion.

This suspicion is not based merely on *attraction to the privatized* model of religion as liberals tend to assert. It is much more complicated than that. For some there is a fear of losing the social and political autonomy which the restriction of Church authority to the private allowed them to develop. They fear the Church's move into the public sphere includes the extension of hierarchical control over their political life as well as their "spiritual" life. Such people are wont to ask how a Church that is not without a need to change internally on religious issues (as evinced in Vatican II) can claim to speak with authority on social, political issues.³⁴ In others, longstanding acceptance of hierar-

³³The second draft of the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace, for example, oscillates between old style demands ("Catholics must . . ." to men and women in the military) to more basic recognition of basic autonomy in conscience.

³⁴Much of the opposition to the U.S. bishops' letter on war and peace both at the local level (as seen in newspapers and radio talkshows) and at the national level (the formation

chical authority in the privatized sphere of family and religion has given them an image of themselves as incapable of agency, incapable of action in the public sphere. For these, the calls to involvement in the evangelization of the world are largely incomprehensible. They cling to privatized religion as the source of meaning in their lives, and often resent Vatican II for its disruption of the devotions which nourished their religious lives. They tend to feel that since Vatican II the Church has been so intent on the development of a masculinized public role that it has slighted the feminine, nurturing, intuitional activities which had come to characterize the privatized Church. Some of the attractions of the old Church were the beauty of the traditional worship, the unassuming homiletic style (which, though often deplorable, did at its low key, pastoral best, present, as if from confessor to penitent, the wisdom acquired through years of struggle for individual virtue) and the private devotions like novenas, rosary, and 40 hours which provided an atmosphere for both meditative communion with the divine and critical assessment of one's life and faith. Likewise, prominence of Marian devotion in the pre-Vatican II Church was the result of a commonly felt attraction to feminine, essentially private mediation of the God/human encounter. It was these feminine attractions in the pre-Vatican Church, rather than the authoritarianism of the lack of community, which nourished the laity.

Yet these nurturing activities, and the individualistic interpretations of the sacraments which accompanied them, were marginalized, or eliminated after Vatican II. In the attempt to become a public community, privatization was attacked within the Church as well as in the Church's understanding of its relationship with the world. The internal crisis in the Church is that the old attractions are largely gone but their replacements are incomplete.

Real community was supposed to replace the traditional forms of nurture. Unfortunately, we are in some ways further from real community than before Vatican II. What used to pass for community in the large ethnic, urban parishes of the United States was shared experiences of urban ghettos and clerical and religious domination begun in parochial school and extended through the reception of Extreme Unction before death. Mobility, lay education, and the effects of Vatican II verbiage have lessened authoritarianism, inclined laity to be more active, and ended the phenomenon of the local ethnic Church where everybody knows everybody. Thus the old basis of community is lost. The new community in which individuals share themselves at all levels with others, where all take responsibility for the community has not yet arrived. The Church does not seem to have realized that real community cannot be mandated.

of the American Catholic Committee) comes from people who still resent Vatican II as a disruption of their religious certainty and consequent security.

Moreover, since it is voluntary it requires autonomy both for participating members and for the communities they create.

That autonomy is not possible yet within the Church. Power to choose pastors and bishops, to dispose of community property, to hire and fire staff, to veto lay decisions, is still vested in the bishops and pastors.³⁵ Lay autonomy exists—where it does—solely at the whim of the pastor/bishop. Vatican II itself was a series of reforms chosen for the laity by the hierarchy. Vatican II never realized that the laity of the Church cannot fulfill the Vatican II goal of evangelizing the world unless the laity is allowed the autonomy required to form community capable of supporting such a crusade. The laity cannot be expected both to function in the public world of critical rationality and autonomy and to uncritically follow the dictates of the hierarchy. Herein lies the inconsistency of Vatican II, and of the Church's reform efforts ever since.

IV. *The Feminist Perspective and the Church's Dilemma*

Eliminating the contradictions in present Church operations requires a feminist perspective. The Church will not be able to embody both masculine and feminine aspects, nor to address both public and private areas effectively, until it heals the division between them. The masculine/feminine dualism, and its offspring the public/private dualism, preceded the Church. But when the Church decided that women could be Christians, did have souls, and could be saved,³⁶ it took on a task which entailed a mission to be relevant to both sides of the dualism. That is a task beyond the abilities of any institution to do well. For in a world characterized by such dualism, the institution itself is relegated to one side of the dualism or the other. To escape such a fate the institution must abolish the dualism itself. Feminism can be useful at this task.

The major focus of feminist scholarship has been succinctly summed up in the phrase "the personal is political." Feminism is the belief that men and women are equal. Feminism has arisen precisely because the division and the rationale for the division between the public and private realms of reality have developed chinks in modern society. The chinks are most easily perceived by those who are forced by circumstances or personal drive to straddle the fence between the masculine public and the feminized private domains. The fence provides a new vantage point, which leads not only to belief in the equality of the sexes, but to new ways of perceiving reality as a whole.

³⁵The New Code of Canon Law continues this situation virtually unchanged—as is to be expected since it was drawn up within the present center of power.

³⁶These decisions were not, of course, finally made until the late Middle Ages. The fact that Thomas Aquinas felt obliged to deal with such questions in the *Summa* attests to their real presence in the Church of his time.

Feminist scholarship is leading the way in demonstrating through the use of history, psychology, economics and sociology that the political world has always influenced (some would say determined) the structure of personal life. Self-consciously feminist writers have traced domestic concepts which popes took for granted as natural—the social institution of childhood, the character of women, the nuclear family, the division of labor inside and outside the home, the educative role of women, and home as the center of “real” life—and demonstrated that these concepts are the result of widespread social patterns in the economy and the political arena.³⁷

In fact, the social and the domestic are inseparable. We are whole persons, inevitably involved in both areas. Compartmentalization works well for desks; it is not a successful strategy for people. The lack of integration of the two areas for many people causes intense stress, and is suspected of being a contributing cause not only of depression and mental illness, but also of physical ailments.³⁸

The home cannot be isolated from the currents sweeping society; it cannot be a refuge either for human beings or for religion. To retreat to the home is naive; at most it buys a little time until the threats must be faced. Investing the domestic sphere with the rank of “real world”—the place where we are really ourselves, where self-creation is possible and happiness and fulfillment are found—is simplistic. Whatever we are fleeing, whether alienating, boring work, low status, irreverence for religion, divorce, drugs, materialism or anything else, follows us into the home, if only in our fear. Moreover, our private lives and relationships cannot stand the pressure of having to compensate for the part (often the larger part) of our lives that is not fulfilling. Thus there arises what many today call the crisis of the family. Social problems are echoed in family problems.

This is the argument of feminist scholarship, which investigated the family only to be led from it to social problems. Rigid sexual stereotyping and sexism in the working class compared to the middle class suggest something about the relationship between self-image and class

³⁷ See, for example, Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Malaise* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1976); Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer, *Men and Masculinity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974) and Joseph H. Pleck, *The Myth of Masculinity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981); Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families* (New York: Random House, 1979); and Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women? Experiences from Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon, 1974).

³⁸ Especially of heart attack and stroke. Many corporations are offering workshops for their employees on ways of integrating work and family to cut down on the costly medical effects of job-related stress and its pressures on the home and health.

location.³⁹ Correlations between rates of spouse and child abuse and rates of unemployment suggest even more about the connection between public and private realms.⁴⁰ Studies of the effect of public assistance on family structure and self-perception push the social/private connection; examinations of the effects of white racist attitudes on black sexual relations and family life break open yet new avenues of investigation.⁴¹

This attack on the social/private split by feminist scholarship is crucial to the attempt to change the Church's understanding of its mission of evangelization. Evangelization had been commonly understood to mean converting new members to profess belief in the doctrine of the Church. Since Vatican II the trend has been to widen the meaning of evangelization to include the conversion of the world to Christian values and lifestyles, to humanize the world. The humanization of the world requires the reconciling of the public and private aspects of reality. If warmth, compassion, forgiveness and love continue to be understood as natural to and appropriate for only the domestic sphere of personal relations, then the Good News does not have much chance of a serious hearing in the world.

The release of women from exclusively domestic concerns, contrary to much nineteenth century feminist thinking,⁴² is not enough to liberate women or to improve the social sphere. Though the split in reality originated with the exclusion of women from the public sphere, we see today that the inclusion of women in the public sphere is insufficient to eliminate the split. Both sexes do participate in both realms, but the public/private split and the stereotypic views of the sexes are preserved by the insistence that women accept primary responsibility for maintaining the domestic refuges, and a secondary, supportive public role as breadwinner. (One may doubt that this is a stable situation, however entrenched it seems. Sooner or later women carrying the double burden of full domestic responsibility and shared public responsibility begin to question their role).

Women are not more naturally good, loving, gentle, tactful, and all the other Christian adjectives for virtue. If women seem to be virtuous, it is because they have been denied power and autonomy, and have had to develop sensitivity, tact, and other endearing qualities as tactics for surviving and thriving. If their environment changes, so will their characterological response to it. We can only evangelize the world by

³⁹Lillian Breslow Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

⁴⁰Martin, *Battered Wives*, pp. 54-55.

⁴¹Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Random House, 1971); Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Dial, 1978).

⁴²Many feminists advocated suffrage on the grounds that the greater morality of women would eliminate corruption and evils (such as war) in the public sphere when women were granted political power.

seeing that all of us, men and women alike, develop Christian virtues and practice them in all areas of our lives. The home and private life has only the virtue we attribute to it and the healing and restorative power we invest in it.

If we are to bring the world to worship of God, we cannot hope to succeed with all those who doubt the existence of, and feel unworthy of, a loving God until we couple the preaching of God's love with real evidence of that love working through the Church community to end their alienation and victimization. The warmth which has characterized the natural family must be extended to all God's family. The Spirit does not restrict its communication of God's love to those in the family, but spreads it through the public sphere in social and political events also. So should we. The domestic sphere is neither naturally separate from the public domain, nor does it enjoy any kind of Christian privilege. Certainly Jesus did not elevate the domestic sphere: neither in his treatment of his own family,⁴³ nor in speaking to his disciples about theirs.⁴⁴ In fact, the early Church invested singleness with importance in order to free people from the exclusive claims of domestic life so that Christians could evangelize by carrying the love and example of Jesus to others in the world. The Church *itself* was to embody in the world all the virtues of the natural family—love, loyalty, compassion, obedience.⁴⁵

If the Church is to succeed in the public agenda it has set for itself, it must address itself to healing the public/private split. The split is real, and cannot be ignored. It is through ignoring the split that the Church has allowed itself to support an internal dualism which has the potential to divide the Church. This dualism consists of two different and contradictory messages concerning human nature, humanization, the nature of the Kingdom, and the work of the Church. One message, the public one, stresses autonomy, responsibility, community conscience, the presence of the Spirit, and proportional consequentialism as the appropriate moral methodology. The other, internal, message contains an imposed, absolutist moral code (especially in sexuality and Church law) and a method of decision-making which is remote from the person, hierarchical, and non-communal in the extreme. This internal message mandates the nurture of individuals by women, and orders the formation of community and conscience in the structured absence of either possible role models or real freedom to experiment and learn. In this message there is little reference to the presence of the Spirit in the here and now, but much is made of the role of the Spirit in the establishment of authority and past tradition.

⁴³Lk 2:49; Mt 12:46-50; Lk 8:19-21; Mk 3:31-35.

⁴⁴Lk 14:25-29; Mt 10:37-38; Lk 9:59-62; Mt 8:19-22.

⁴⁵See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward the Construction of a Christian Social Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 190.

Some feminist suggestions for the healing of the public/private dualism in the Church follow. It is important to note that these suggestions are linked. Should the institutional Church try to implement only those most palatable, the split may again be altered, but it probably will not be eliminated.

1. Ordain women, make celibacy voluntary, and open some governance positions (at synods, Councils and in the Curia) to male and female laity. This would separate the clerical/lay division from the male/female division, from the celibate/sexually active division, as well as prevent these three from coinciding with the powerful/powerless division. Internal power constellations might become more open to creative new combinations.

2. Much more consultation needs to be done before the magisterium speaks. The consultation process for the Midwest bishops' statement *Strangers and Guests: Toward Community in the Heartland*⁴⁶—a series of open meetings—seems a good step in this direction. The consultation process should prevent bishops from speaking out of ignorance on important lay concerns (such as sexuality), as well as provide a setting where bishops can stimulate a lay thought on important issues such as nuclear war or farm policy. The bishops' statements will sometimes lag behind the general stance of the laity, but the distance should be minimized. Neither is it good for bishops to be far in advance of the laity, for their teaching authority is equally weakened then. Prophetic voices, however courageous and principled they appear when unheeded by the many, are most effective when operating just two steps ahead of the masses.

3. Authoritarianism must be rooted out and replaced by some steps toward democratic representation. This does not necessarily mean election of bishops, cardinals, and popes. But we need to recapture the original role of the local community in calling priests to ordination, and reflect that important role in the relationships canon law structures between parish and pastor, parish and bishop, and parish and seminary. Experimentation is in order here, and a pluralism of models may well be necessary. But if the community which all the liturgical reforms claim to call forth is really desired, it must be given a function in the Church. The most concrete manifestation of community is the local parish. It needs to be other-oriented, to have a task, a responsibility, a mission. It should not be an end in itself. The parish must be trusted to be Christian in the fullest sense of the word.

4. The Church must end its moral dualism. It must approach moral issues in the private sphere with the same ethical method it uses in the public sphere. Proportional consequentialism must replace traditional

⁴⁶*Strangers and Guests*, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 4625 N.W. Beaver Drive, Des Moines, Iowa 50322.

method in the private sphere not only in order to end the prevailing methodological recognition of two realms, but also because traditional method's absolutist propensities are incompatible with the decentralization of power which accompanies the end of authoritarianism.⁴⁷

The Church must also provide support for those seeking to form and to act on individual conscience. Bishops' statements in this country have of necessity begun to acknowledge that they are advisory, to be considered seriously, but not binding on decisions of conscience.⁴⁸ There have been a very few papal intimations of such approach, especially under Paul VI.⁴⁹ The present instrument for Examination of U.S. Seminaries, drawn up at the request of John Paul II, contains a section asking seminaries to describe their teaching on conscience and magisterium, and uses language which presumes that even the informed conscience is an insignificant moral authority, especially compared to the presumed authority of the magisterium. Moral dependence makes any form of authentic communal responsibility impossible.

5. The Church must forego or redefine some of its most traditional language and imagery—among them, the use of the feminine for Church,⁵⁰ including the analogy of Church as bride of Christ. References to all Christians as brothers, sons of Christ, men, must be made inclusive. Individual episcopates must be allowed to reselect Mass readings from Scripture, or the readings should be changed for the entire Church. Every set of readings is selective according to the values of its agents; the agents who selected Old Testament and New Testament readings for our A, B and C liturgical cycles shared some different values than we do today. Readings should be chosen primarily for their teaching value. There is no excuse to be reading either "Wives, be submissive to your husbands" or the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in an age when the Church publicly refers to the equality of men and women and to the parental love of God for all of us—even children like Isaac.

The analogy between Christ and Church (and Israel as the bride of Yahweh) is a difficult one. It will lend support to sexism and public/private dualism so long as our concept of God is so masculine.⁵¹ The feminist question of whether Christianity can be other than patriarchal when both God and the Incarnated offspring of God are masculine is important. Perhaps this masculinity of the divine is one reason why even Vatican II reforms aimed supposedly at creating a human community of

⁴⁷Timothy O'Connell's treatment of traditional moral method and the revisionist position in *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (New York: Seabury, 1978) makes this point well.

⁴⁸The second draft of the U.S. Bishops pastoral letter on nuclear war ends with this acknowledgment.

⁴⁹*Octogesima adveniens*, 3-4

⁵⁰Letty Russell, "Changing Language and the Church" in Letty Russell, ed., *The Liberating Word* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 87-88.

⁵¹See *ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

faith have taken on such a strong masculine tone of domination. Is it too late for us to go back, and discover and lift up in God's interaction with our ancestors feminine qualities also? Is it too late for God to be androgynous? We can only eliminate the public/private split by eliminating the perceived split between masculine and feminine. This in turn may depend upon our ability to deny superiority to the masculine based upon its being characteristic of divinity.

6. The Church must stop teaching traditional sex roles in sermons, documents, and parochial schools, colleges and seminaries. Catholic schools should be coed and assume that all persons should be capable of earning a living, taking care of personal needs like cooking, sewing, driving and car repair, and participating in athletics. Both sexes should be represented on pastoral and teaching staffs from parish through seminary. Let us have no more sermons on women as fruitful vines who are a credit to their husband's homes, or on the seductive power of women exemplified in Eve. No more assuming that all men—and only men—are spiritually and morally bankrupt and dependent because they work hard to fill their role as sole family breadwinner in a harsh world. No more assuming that women and children are natural pairs and belong together at home. The Church's concern for the care of children and the establishment and maintenance of domestic life should be addressed to both parents. Neither should the Church presume that the home is an oasis in the desert of society, for this is to deny the possibility of real community in the Church or in society in general.

7. Lastly, the Church must somehow reverse the *feeling* labels it has attached to both private religious life and life in the world. Joy is not only present in the personal encounters with the divine in liturgy and prayer. Nor is it restricted to religion and domestic events such as marriage, childbirth, and sticky children's kisses. Joy is also found in our social experiences, in the steps groups take toward community and peace, in small victories over injustice. There is no corner of our lives that is not open to joy, just as there is no corner immune to suffering. Perhaps if we celebrated the social joys more we could move beyond the common understanding that our private, religious joys support us in the depressing obligation of working in the world.

Conclusion

Religion suffered both from the discoveries of science and from the Enlightenment philosophy and politics they accompanied in that, due to Church opposition to scientific and philosophical innovation, religion in the popular mind became increasingly divorced from reason as represented by scientific method.

The Church fought the labels of irrationality, intuition, and femininity, but because of a series of defeats at the hands of secular and anti-

clerical liberalism, by the twentieth century the Church had been pushed out of the public realm as a principal actor. The Church's acceptance of a new role on the feminized domestic side of the public/private dualism reinforced the conviction in the public mind that religion is a private life interest of irrational, subordinate creatures.

Vatican II was an attempt on the part of the hierarchy to move the Church back over to the masculine, public side of the public/private split. Feminist analysis suggests both a way of explaining the internal and external crises engendered by this attempt on the part of the hierarchy, and steps which can solve these crises through a process eliminating the public/private distinction completely. The elimination of the public/private split seems, within feminist analysis, necessary if the Church is to be effective in satisfying the demands of the Gospel to evangelize all areas of our lives.