

## **THE RELEVANCE OF JOHN PAUL II FOR WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES**

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With the advent of a heightened awareness of the dignity of women, many universities have inaugurated departments of Women and Gender Studies which seek to foster an appreciation of women and their contributions to modern society.<sup>1</sup> If this new area of study is to be integrated into the traditional areas of study so that students can be presented with a coherent view of reality, it will need a philosophical structure that allows for such integration. In order to assess the suitability of the philosophy that has shaped the present ethos of the American secular university to provide such integration, I shall describe that ethos. Secondly, I shall present a historical sketch of the origins of such thinking. Thirdly, I shall describe an alternative philosophical option as proposed by John Paul II. Fourthly, I shall compare texts from a representative textbook used in courses in Women and Gender studies and texts drawn from the writings of John Paul II. Fifthly, I shall analyze these texts critically. Finally, I shall draw some modest conclusions.

### I. The Ethos of Contemporary American Universities

The regnant ethos of the American university, according to Alasdair MacIntyre, is one in which “each academic discipline is treated as autonomous and self-defining, so that its practitioners, or at least the most prestigious and influential among them, prescribe to those

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<sup>1</sup> The subject for this essay was originally proposed in 2008 as the topic for a public lecture due to concerns expressed by students about the direction of the Department of Women and Gender Studies of the University of Guam. The lecture never materialized, and in this essay I have since expanded the original scope of the lecture.

entering the discipline what its scope and limits are.”<sup>2</sup> Because of the autonomy characteristic of specialized studies, these programs of study often lack any overarching view of reality that allows them to be integrated into the other disciplines. Different departments inhabit different universes. The often unnoticed result of this lack of integration is that a university education is unable to provide a student with a coherent view of reality.

The contemporary American university has been shaped by a culture that grants primacy of form over content as the perceived condition for guaranteeing the proper autonomy of any given discipline.<sup>3</sup> This means that the methodology that is employed by the various sciences is established before any consideration is given to the content of the discipline “as the necessary condition for not prejudging the meaning and truth of the world.”<sup>4</sup> This prioritizing is accomplished by making the beginning point of reflection to be the adoption of neutrality with regard to any judgment regarding the truth derived from any other source of knowledge other than what proceeds from reason. Faith is viewed as a source of opinions, not knowledge. Thus, to secure a mode of rationality that is beyond suspicion of being contaminated by false beliefs all judgments regarding the meaning of the world must be suspended. The result of this methodology is a secularization of the intellect whereby the mind is forced to function as if God did not exist and to perceive the world as if it could exist without God. The order of reason is effectively divorced from the order of faith, resulting, as David L. Schindler has observed, in either a practical atheism because, as a matter of methodology it does not acknowledge a relationship with God, or in a theoretical atheism because it does not believe that there is God to whom the mind needs to relate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, philosophy, universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) 15–6. (hereafter *God, philosophy, universities*)

<sup>3</sup> David L. Schindler, “Trinity, Creation, and the Order of Intelligence in the Modern Academy,” *Communio* XXVIII (2001) 406–28 at 417.

<sup>4</sup> Schindler, 417.

<sup>5</sup> Schindler, 422.

The evidence that the contemporary American academy operates with such a divorce between the order of intelligence and the order of relationality is the fact that the various disciplines do not pose questions to one another about the overarching framework of reality nor do they expect to be questioned “about what bearing each of them has on the others and how each contributes to an overall understanding of the nature of things.”<sup>6</sup> The culture has not noticed that an integrated pursuit of truth has been abandoned in favor of one that focuses on the “what” and “how” of the empirical sciences but which overlooks the “why” of things. The result is that the culture assumes that an explanation for the world is that which the empirical sciences consider to be an explanation: namely, one that speaks about “what” and “how” but has nothing to say about “why.”<sup>7</sup>

The culture which produced the disintegration of the intellectual pursuit of truth was a culture that has abandoned any interest in theological inquiry. Without theology, no one had the responsibility for relating the autonomous branches of secular knowledge. “Where, on a Catholic view,” says MacIntyre, “the study of the different aspects of nonhuman nature and human society that provide each of the different secular disciplines with their subject matter is always to be understood as contributing to a knowledge of the whole, the universe, the key to whose unity is found through theological enquiry, the modern university had set out in a direction that led toward the fragmentation of knowledge and understanding, toward a multiplicity of enquires accompanied by no sense of any underlying unity.”<sup>8</sup>

## II. The Philosophical Origins of the Ethos

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<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, *God, philosophy, universities*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, “On Being a Theistic Philosopher in a Secularized Culture,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 84 (2010) 25.

<sup>8</sup> MacIntyre, *God, philosophy, universities*, 135.

The origins of the line of thought that was to produce modernity can be traced to a shift in metaphysical thinking regarding the notion of being. Up to the time of Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224-1274), creaturely dependence on the Creator had the priority over the question of being. Thus the being of the creature was distinguished from that of the Creator. Being was predicated therefore analogously. The being of God and the being Man were not the same act of being.

In order to answer the question of the unity of the subject matter for metaphysics, the Franciscan philosopher, John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308), broke with Aquinas by shifting from a metaphysics of analogy (one in which “being” can be understood in various ways) to one of univocity (one in which “being” has only one meaning). The reason for this shift was Scotus’s interpretation of a text from the Muslim philosopher, Avicenna (Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Abd Allah ibn Sinā) (c. 980-1037). Looking both to Aristotle and to Avicenna for guidance on the problem of how to unify the science of metaphysics, Scotus took Aristotle’s comment that in forming the concept “the intellect begins with what is most common and most confused” and interpreted it in the light of what Avicenna had written: “*ens prima impressione imprimatur in intellectu.*”<sup>9</sup> Scotus reasoned that “[w]hatever is imprinted first cannot therefore be God or creatures, it cannot be substance or any of the other categories, nor can it be many of these at the same time. It must be more common than any of these, it must be a concept common to all these. It must likewise be more confused than proper concepts. So, even though ‘being’ is distinct in the sense of absolutely simple and separated from differences, it is the most confused concept from the viewpoint of the number of specifying notes it possesses in its content. The concept of being first coming into the mind is truly one and most common predicable of all things in the same sense.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Brown, “Avicenna and the Unity of the Concept of Being,” *Franciscan Studies* 25 (1965) 130.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Brown, “Avicenna and the Unity of the Concept of Being,” *Franciscan Studies* 25 (1965) 130.

“In summary,” says Brown, “the unity Scotus sees in ‘being’ is a simple unity uncomplicated by differences or properties. It is a unity of one *ratio*, one signification, one single meaning. Furthermore, it is a distinct *ratio* since the differences which could remove this distinctness are outside this concept. Such a concept is possible for [M]an because we can prescind from the differences among beings. And this concept is necessary, for it alone provides the intellect with an adequate proper object and metaphysics with a true unity. Further, it alone permits a positive natural knowledge of God. And Scotus is confident that, while this univocal concept permits us to attain a knowledge of God, it does not compromise His transcendence. Henry of Ghent hesitated to accept any type of a common concept for fear of endangering this transcendence. Once Scotus saw that there was no such danger he saw no other choice.”<sup>11</sup>

Scotus thus affirmed that the Creator and his creation experienced the same kind of act of being. This move had, however, unintended consequences. By putting his consideration of the act of being before the act of creation, Scotus endowed creation with a metaphysical autonomy. He thereby unhooked creation from its need to understand its existence as a participation in the existence of God. By allowing the being of the universe to be intelligible apart from the being of God, Scotus unwittingly shifted the universe from the category of creation (implying a necessary relationship to a creator) to the category of nature (not implying a necessary relationship). Seen in this light, creation disappeared, its place taken by nature. Unlike creation, nature does not imply necessarily a creator, and so the evidence of the existence of God also disappeared. The world around us no longer spoke of God’s existence. It now became thinkable to ask the question: “Is there a God?” in much the same way that one can ask the question “Is there an Easter Bunny?” or “Is there a Santa

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<sup>11</sup> Brown, 130-1.

Claus?” The negative answer would not appear at first glance to make the world unintelligible.

John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock have pointed to the Scotistic shift in the foundations of metaphysics as the beginning of modernity whose touchstone for them is secularism.<sup>12</sup> This consequence was not intended, nor did secularism appear immediately. Nevertheless, a crack had been opened up between God and the universe, a crack that progressively widened until faith and reason lost the inner connection that allowed them to complement one another.<sup>13</sup> In time faith lost all credibility as a source of knowledge and was reduced to the status of opinion.

This estimation of faith that the Enlightenment nurtured was the view that shaped the intellectual world of the nineteenth century until its own short-comings became too obvious to ignore. The philosopher most responsible for the critique of modernity and the advent of the outlook of post-modernity is Friedrich Nietzsche. In his book *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Walter Kaufmann tells us that this nineteenth century German philosopher prophetically envisaged himself as a madman.<sup>14</sup> He was one of the first to grasp with startling clarity the consequences of the modern world’s denial of the existence of God. Synthesizing Nietzsche’s thought, Kaufmann puts these words on the lips of Nietzsche: “We have destroyed our own faith in God. There remains only the void. We are falling. Our dignity is gone. Our values are lost. Who is to say what is up and what is down?” In these

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<sup>12</sup> John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 44; See James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2004) 96–100; John Milbank & Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, (New York: Routledge, 2001) 45.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994) 54–5. ‘Older theologians had maintained that the proper object of theological effort was the faith as presented in the articulations (articles) of the creed. In more modern terminology we might say that it is a consideration of the divine acts of revelation as they have been transposed from existing in narrative to being stated in proposition. It is in this sense that Aquinas cites the definition of an “article of faith” as “a taking hold [*perceptio*] of divine truth that leads us to the truth itself [*tendens in ipsam*].” The movement of the mind toward intelligibility, including the expression of conclusions, is performed in virtue of the light of the *divine reality itself*, which becomes a principle of knowledge: *sacra doctrina*, for Aquinas, is, as we have seen, an imprint of the divine knowledge. For Ockham, the conclusions of theology come about by the application of the light of logic to the proposition in which the article of faith is expressed. A greater difference in viewpoint could not be imagined.’

<sup>14</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, (Fourth Edition) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1974) 97.

words Kaufmann shows clearly that Nietzsche saw that the consequence of atheism is nihilism. “This sense of the utter bleakness of life and the ‘devaluation’ of all values, which is the immediate consequence of the modern loss of faith in God” writes Kaufmann, “is not just a casual insight which can be illustrated by the parable of the madman or by some other scattered aphorisms: most of the drafts for [Nietzsche’s] *magnum opus* envisage as the contents of the first book a development of this theme to which Nietzsche gave the name of nihilism.”<sup>15</sup>

The death of God, a phrase which Nietzsche coined to characterize a pivotal development in modern culture – and one which he applauded – would in Nietzsche’s judgment provoke a “revaluation” of all moral evaluations that had gone before it. This ‘revaluation’ was not to be simply a new value-legislation but one that deliberately reversed all ancient evaluations.<sup>16</sup> According to Kaufmann, this “revaluation is thus the alleged discovery that our morality is, *by its own standards*, poisonously immoral: that Christian love is the mimicry of impotent hatred; that most unselfishness is but a particularly vicious form of selfishness; and that *ressentiment* is at the core of our morals.”<sup>17</sup> Kaufmann explains that the revaluation proposed by Nietzsche “culminates in the claim that the so-called goodness of modern man is not virtuous, that his so-called religion is not religious, and that his so-called truths are not truthful.”<sup>18</sup> This is the attack that Nietzsche made against Christianity and its moral teachings which he viewed as the expression of *ressentiment*.

### III. An Alternative Proposal by John Paul II

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<sup>15</sup> Kaufmann, 101.

<sup>16</sup> Kaufmann, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Kaufmann, 113.

<sup>18</sup> Kaufmann, 114.

This attack did not go unanswered. In 1912 the German philosopher, Max Scheler, published a book defending Christianity from Nietzsche's charge of *ressentiment*.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Scheler saw *ressentiment* as a useful concept to express what happens when there is a "discrepancy between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its factual power."<sup>20</sup> In this way Nietzsche's concept of resentment passed into the vocabulary of Catholic thinkers who came into contact with Scheler's phenomenological philosophy. One of these was Karol Wojtyła, known to the world since 1978 as Pope John Paul II. In 1960, while still a professor of moral philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin, Wojtyła published his book *Love and Responsibility*. Acknowledging his debt to Scheler, Wojtyła pointed out that "Scheler saw a need for the rehabilitation of virtue because he discerned in modern man a characteristic spiritual attitude which is inimical to sincere respect for it. He has called this attitude 'resentment.'"<sup>21</sup> As Kaufmann has pointed out, this resentment takes the form of a devaluation whereby what was previously judged to be noble and good is now declared to be a disease that needs to be eliminated. Those who are in the minority or who experience themselves not only as disfavored by the traditional order but also powerless to change their situation are at risk of giving way to envy of those who have what they do not have. Their way of responding can take the form of a resentment which seeks to invert any moral hierarchy that privileges traditionally sanctioned virtues and institutions that are seen as sources of oppression by those who do not or cannot embrace them. In their eyes, any kind of privileging of what they do not possess is seen as the establishment of inequality. Resentment's way of abolishing privilege and establishing equality in its place is to devalue what is privileged. The result of such a process is that what is devalued begins to lose its good name in the culture. The more people speak badly of what

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<sup>19</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Scheler, 28, as quoted by G. J. McAleer, "The Vatican's 'Instruction' and Gay Marriage," *Nova et Vetera*, 6 (2008) 213.

<sup>21</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981) 143.



was formerly considered virtue, the more it loses its “reputation” in the eyes of the young and impressionable of the culture. It begins to be viewed as a perversion of the good and as a vice that needs to be exterminated. Moreover, those institutions – such as the Bible or marriage – that privilege that virtue suffer the same fate. They begin to be seen as obstacles to human fulfillment.

#### IV. A Comparison of Texts

To what extent has resentment entered into and shaped the academic curriculum of Women and Gender Studies? The methodology that we will use to examine this question will be very simply. We shall simply cite passages from a standard textbook that are employed at reputable institutions of higher learning, such as our own University of Guam, and then compare them with comments drawn from other sources. For our purposes, in order to have a document that does not share the resentment so characteristic of modern culture, we will use the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* of John Paul II.

How does one respected pro-woman text, *Women’s Realities, Women’s Choices*, present the biblical account of the man-woman relationship?

In one version of the story of Adam and Eve, an origin myth for Christians and Jews, man is created by God “in his own image.” Here we learn that man came first and that God is like man (because man is like God). Eve was made as a companion to Adam and constructed from his rib. This tells women that they are subordinate to men in that they are made from men (but not the reverse) and that they exist to serve men’s needs. The next event in this creation myth is that Eve, defying God, eats the apple

and leads Adam into sin. From this, women learn that they are morally weak, that they cannot resist temptation, and that their weakness leads men into trouble.<sup>22</sup>

What then are the points that the authors of *Women's Realities, Women's Choices* try to make about the biblical texts:

1) From the comment that man is created by God "in his own image," the text concludes that the biblical text is using "man" not in the generic sense of *ανθρωπος* but in the gender specific sense of *ανερ*, (man as opposed to woman).

2) From the account of Eve made as a companion to Adam and fashioned from his rib, the text concludes "that they are subordinate to men in that they are made from men (but not the reverse) and that they exist to serve men's needs."

3) From the story of the original sin the author understands that the biblical author pins the blame on Eve. Defying God, she is the one who leads Adams into sin. The author of *Women's Realities* sees here the seeds for a poor self-image being projected upon women as someone who is morally weak and a source of trouble for men.

Obviously, given this understanding of the biblical teaching of the origins of man and woman, anyone seeking to construct a positive image of women for a course on Women or Gender Studies would immediately discount anything coming from the Bible or the Judeo-Christian worldview that accompanies it. Such sources would simply be a further negative influence that Women and Gender Studies were meant to counter in the first place.

But is this reading of Genesis an accurate reading? John Paul II has a different reading. "Let us enter," he says, "into the setting of the biblical 'beginning.' In it, the revealed truth concerning man as 'the image and likeness' of God constitutes the immutable *basis of all Christian anthropology.*"<sup>23</sup> What John Paul II means by the term "Christian

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<sup>22</sup> *Women's Realities, Women's Choices: An Introduction to Women's Studies* (Third Edition) (p.25).

<sup>23</sup> MD 6.

anthropology” is the understanding of the human being that faith provides. This view is what he refers to as an “adequate” anthropology. The implication is that, if the human being is not seen in the eyes of faith, we do not have an adequate understanding of who we are as human beings. Therefore, any attentive reading of what he says about Genesis must be looking for the presuppositions that underlie his reading of Genesis. What these are will hopefully become apparent as we follow in his interpretation of the biblical text.

To begin, the pope first quotes Gen. 1:26-27, the first of the two accounts of the creation of Man. There are two account of the creation in Genesis. The RSV translation reflects this when it renders the text thus: “This God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the ea5rth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”<sup>24</sup>

The authors of *Women’s Realities* have mixed the two accounts. The story of the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib is from the second account. Then the pope comments: “This concise passage contains the fundamental anthropological truths: man is the highpoint of the whole order of creation in the visible world; the human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are crated in God’s image. 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). The Creator entrusts dominion over the earth to the human race, to all persons, to all men and women, who derive their dignity and vocation from the common ‘beginning.’”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gen 1: 26-27.

<sup>25</sup> MD 6.

John Paul II then takes up the second account of the creation of the first couple. “In the description found in Gen 2:18-25,” he writes, “the woman is created by God ‘from the rib’ of the man and is placed at his side as another ‘I,’ as the companion of the man, who is alone in the surrounding world of living creatures and who finds in none of them a ‘helper’ suitable for himself. Called into existence in this way, the woman is immediately recognized by the man as ‘flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones’ (cf. Gen 2:23) and for this reason she is called ‘woman.’”<sup>26</sup>

The Hebrew word for woman (*'issah*) is derived from the Hebrew word for man (*'is*). The same situation prevails in English. The word “woman” is derived from the word “man.” In this way, says the pope, the Bible wishes to indicate woman’s essential identity with regard to man. “The biblical text,” he writes, “provides sufficient bases for recognizing the essential quality of man and woman from the point of view of their humanity. From the very beginning, both are persons, unlike the other living beings in the world about them. The woman is another ‘I’ in a common humanity. From the very beginning they appear as a ‘unity of the two,’ and this signifies that the original solitude is overcome, the solitude in which man does not find ‘a helper fit for him’ (Gen 2:20). 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 with her ‘one flesh’ and for this reason leaving ‘his father and his mother’ (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).”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> MD 6.

<sup>27</sup> MD 6.

What then are the points that the pope tries to make about the biblical texts?

1) The first thing is that both man and woman are made in the image of God. “By reflecting on the whole account found in Gen 2: 18-25, and by interpreting it in the light of the truth about the image and likeness of God (Cf. Gen 1: 26-27), we can understand even more fully what constitutes the personal character of the human being, thanks to which both man and woman are like God. 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.”<sup>28</sup>

2) The second point that the pope wishes to make is “that man cannot exist ‘alone’ (cf. Gen 2:18); he can exist only as a ‘unity of the two,’ and therefore in relation to another human person. It is a question here of a mutual relationship: man to woman and woman to man. Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other ‘I.’ This [truth] 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.”<sup>29</sup>

3) The third point builds upon the second. “The fact that man ‘created as man and woman’ is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God as a rational and free being. It also means that 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, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God through the unity of the divinity, exist as persons through the inscrutable divine relationship. Only in this way can we understand the truth that God in himself is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).”<sup>30</sup> The act of love requires the existence of another, the beloved.

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<sup>28</sup> MD 7.

<sup>29</sup> MD 7.

<sup>30</sup> MD 7.

4) The fourth point builds on the second and third. Man and woman were created for communion one with the other. “This ‘unity of the two’ which is a sign of interpersonal communion, shows that the creation of man is also marked by a certain likeness to the divine communion (*‘communio’*). This likeness is a quality of the personal being of both man and woman, and is also a call and a task. The foundation of the whole *human ‘ethos’* is rooted in the image and likeness of God which the human being bears within himself from the beginning.”<sup>31</sup>

5) The fifth point is a conclusion drawn from this interpersonal communion of the two. Man and woman are called to be a gift, one for the other. “In the ‘unity of the two,’ man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist ‘side by side’ or ‘together,’ but they are also called to exist mutually ‘one for the other.’ John Paul II cites the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes* 22). Here we read: “The Lord Jesus, when he prayed to the Father ‘that all may be one... as we are one’ (Jn 17:21-22), opened up vistas closed to human reason. For he implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons and the union of God’s children in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for its own sake, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.”<sup>32</sup>

6) The sixth point the pope wishes to make is the intrinsic connection that exists between a sincere gift of self and marriage. “The text of Genesis 2:18-25,” he writes, “shows that marriage is the first and, in a sense, the fundamental dimension of this call. But it is not the only one. The whole of human history unfolds within the context of this call. In this history, on the basis of the principle of mutually being ‘for’ the other, in interpersonal ‘communion,’ there develops in humanity itself, in accordance with God’s will, the

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<sup>31</sup> MD 7.

<sup>32</sup> MD 7.

integration of what is ‘masculine’ and what is ‘feminine.’”<sup>33</sup> Concluding this point the pope observes: “Already in the Book of Genesis we can discern, in preliminary outline, the spousal character of the relationship between persons, which will serve as the basis for the subsequent development of the truth about motherhood, and about virginity, as two particular dimensions of the vocation of women in the light of divine Revelation. These two dimensions will find their loftiest expression at the ‘fullness of time’ (cf. Gal. 4:4) in the ‘woman’ of Nazareth: the Virgin-Mother.”<sup>34</sup>

7) The seventh point touches on the biblical account of the original sin. The fact of sin is a paradoxical confirmation that both man and woman share in the image and likeness of God. This image involves freedom, the freedom to accept the gift of God’s love and the order he has planned for his creation. “By committing sin,” the pope says, “man rejects this gift and at the same time will 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.”<sup>35</sup> In so doing, man wants to impose his own order on the world. The consequence of this choice is “a break in the state of original justice: union with God as the source of the unity within his own ‘I,’ in the mutual relationship between man and woman (*communio personarum*) as well as in regard to the external world.”<sup>36</sup> Having broken with original justice, man now has to impose a new order which is sinful, i.e., a distortion of original justice which leads to domination of man over woman. “This domination,” says the pope, “indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the ‘unity of the two:’ and this is especially to the disadvantage of the woman, whereas only the equality resulting from their dignity as persons can give to their mutual relationship the character of an authentic ‘*communio personarum.*’ While the

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<sup>33</sup> MD 7.

<sup>34</sup> MD 7.

<sup>35</sup> MD 9.

<sup>36</sup> MD 9.

violation of this equality, which is both a gift and a right deriving from God the Creator, involves an element to the disadvantage of the woman, at the same time it also diminishes the true dignity of the man.”<sup>37</sup> This later aspect is especially true because, as the pope pointedly remarks: “The matrimonial union requires respect for and a perfecting of the true personal subjectivity of both of them. The woman cannot become the ‘object’ of ‘domination’ and male ‘possession.’ But the words of the biblical text directly concern original sin and its lasting consequences in man and woman. Burdened by hereditary sinfulness, they bear within themselves the constant ‘inclination to sin,’ the tendency to go against the moral order which corresponds to the rational nature and dignity of man and woman as persons.”<sup>38</sup>

## V. A Critical Analysis of Texts

Here we have two very different interpretations of the Book of Genesis. What is missing in the account of the biblical texts as offered by *Women’s Realities, Women’s Choices?* The first thing that is missing is the notion of what it means to be a person, not only in regard to women but equally in regard to men.

The second thing that is missing is the notion of equality of men and women as persons. The third thing that is missing is the significance of sexual differences (masculine and feminine) as constitutive elements of personal identification. The fourth thing missing is the notion of a communion of persons in the unity of masculine and feminine. The fifth thing missing is the notion of the mutual (and exclusive) gift of self to the other that this implies and which is marriage. Finally missing also is an awareness of the dignity of the vocations of motherhood and consecrated virginity.

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<sup>37</sup> MD 9.

<sup>38</sup> MD 9.



How can we account for these differences? The obvious answer is that the authors of *Women's Realities, Women's Choices* and John Paul II do not share the same philosophical or theological anthropology. They have different understandings of what it means to be a human being and what will make a human being happy. David L. Schindler has identified the broader context of the pope's remarks as being what the pope has labeled "the theology of the body." Schindler points out that for the pope the body is revelatory of the human being because the body is the human being. The first of the anthropological presuppositions is that I am my body. There is no distinction between me and my body. The pope considers the positing of such a distinction to be the most basic form of alienation, the alienation from one's own body. Moreover, there can be no real distinction between the body and the person.

The second presupposition, which flows directly from the first, is that sexual differences are both original and revelatory of the person. Persons are male and female such wise that sexual differentiation is etched into every cell of my body. Gender is not a choice; it is a given already determined by the Creator. Moreover, gender differences bespeak the fact that man and woman are designed for nuptiality. The body carries within itself a nuptial meaning. It reveals that man finds his fulfillment in making a gift of himself in love to another who is able to accept that gift in such a way that the two become a unity of two in one flesh.

The third presupposition is that the nuptial body given as an irrevocable gift is a sacrament in virtue of the primordial sacramentality of man and the world. In virtue of this gift, writes the pope, "a primordial sacrament is constituted, understood as a sign that transmits effectively in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial. This is the mystery of truth and love, the mystery of divine life, in which man really participates.... The sacrament, as a visible sign, is constituted with man, as a body, by means of his visible masculinity and femininity. The body, and it alone, is capable of making

visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus be a sign of it.”<sup>39</sup> This invisible mystery is the mystery of God who is love.

The pope continues: “So the very sacramentality of creation, the sacramentality of the world was revealed in a way, in man created in the image of God. By means of his corporality, his masculinity and femininity, man becomes a visible sign of the economy of truth and love, which has its source in God himself and which was revealed already in the mystery of creation.... The sacrament of the world, and the sacrament of man in the world, comes from the divine source of holiness, and at the same time is instituted for holiness.”<sup>40</sup>

The fourth presupposition is that the family is rooted in the body and is the natural and original cell of society. Basing himself on John Paul II’s “nuptial anthropology, David S. Crawford extends the notion by speaking of “familial anthropology.” “Such an anthropology would include the nuptial but would also draw explicit attention to the relationship of paternity, filiality, and fraternity. According to such an anthropology, the gift-structure of the perm permeates every aspect of bodily life, but is most especially manifest in those features of the body’s constitution that display its ordination toward filiality and fraternity (the inescapable genetic likeness and physical resemblance of the child to his parents and siblings), nuptiality (the structured morphology as sexually differentiated beings dynamically ordered to each other through inclination, hormones, psychological make-up, and so forth) and paternity (the fruitful implications of sexual differentiation, genetic structure, instinct, hormones, desire, and so forth). The familial structure of the human person is therefore literally inscribed in his or her body from its very minutest chemical or metabolic processes

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<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 76-77, as quoted by David L. Schindler, “The Significance of World and Culture for Moral Theology: *Veritatis Splendor* and the ‘Nuptial-Sacramental’ Nature of the Body,” *Communio* 31 (2004) 122.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 76-77, as quoted by David L. Schindler, “The Significance of World and Culture for Moral Theology: *Veritatis Splendor* and the ‘Nuptial-Sacramental’ Nature of the Body,” *Communio* 31 (2004) 122.

to its large and visible bodily structures. The man and woman are structured on all of these levels for each other, just as they are structured on every level to conceive, nurture, give birth, nurse, protect, provide, and so forth. Likewise the child is structured on every level to be able to receive nature and sustenance, as well as psychological, emotional, emotional, and educative formation by the parents.”<sup>41</sup>

An additional theological presupposition is the understanding of the Church to be the Bride of Christ who responds to the gift of love given her by her savior Jesus Christ. This attitude of receptivity finds its iconic expression in the *fiat* of Mary, the virgin of Nazareth. The pope echoes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which “confirming the teaching of the whole of tradition, recalled that in the hierarchy of holiness it is precisely the ‘woman,’ Mary of Nazareth, who is the ‘figure’ of the Church. She ‘precedes’ everyone on the path to holiness; in her person ‘the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle’ (Eph 5:27).”<sup>42</sup> These are some of the presuppositions of John Paul II that are pertinent for our study.

For its part, *Women’s Realities, Women’s Choices* has its own set of presuppositions that need to be made explicit. In making this claim, I do not mean to imply that these presuppositions were necessarily present to the consciousness of the authors. Rather, they are the presuppositions of modern culture that has shaped the thinking of the modern academy to which these authors belong. This is the culture of secularization that has its roots in the fundamental transformation of Western civilization that we call the Enlightenment. The roots of the Enlightenment can be found in the religious upheaval that followed in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. A shared theology had supplied the glue for medieval society. Once there was no shared theology to hold European society together, the struggle to defend one view against the other led to the devastating wars that were waged for the political control of

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<sup>41</sup> David S. Crawford, “Recognizing the Roots of Society in the Family, Foundation of Justice,” *Communio*, 34 (2007) 404-5.

<sup>42</sup> MD 27, citing *Lumen gentium*, 65.

society in the century that followed the Reformation. The breakdown of civil society eventually led to the realization that a new basis for civil society needed to be found, one that excluded the divisive theological questions. Livio Melina credits the Dutch theologian, Hugo Grotius, as being one of the first to propose that, if a new society was to emerge in Europe, “social life must be based on rules that flow from rights that are established by autonomous reason and that are valid even on the assumption, which Grotius himself defines as ‘impious,’ that God does not exist or is not concerned with the affairs of men.”<sup>43</sup> Reason, not theology, was to supply the glue for the terms of peace on which a new society could be built. The promotion of this new basis for society is what marks the divide between modernity and what went before it. This rationale, according to Melina, began the process of secularization in the culture that has progressively tended to exclude God completely from the public forum of society and relegated both God and religion to the level of a private affair.

A second factor favoring the growth of secularism was the Enlightenment’s divorce of faith from reason. Faced with the apparent contradictions between what the empirical sciences said were the facts and what the Bible was interpreted fundamentalistically as saying were the facts – the famous case of Galileo being the poster boy for the modern secularists – the Enlightenment saw itself as having to choose between faith and reason. It opted for reason. Reason was seen as the only source of truth; faith simply produced opinions, and no one opinion was any more truthful than another. All were equally private opinions that no longer were given standing in the marketplace of ideals, the university. In this way, the academy became the fortress of secularism.

The first of these presuppositions is that the world has intelligibility on its own terms. God is not necessary to make the world intelligible. Therefore, there is separation between the natural and the supernatural. Because of this separation the world is not sacramental. It

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<sup>43</sup> Livio Melina, “The Eclipse of the Sense of God and of Man,” *Communio* 34 (2007) 107.

does not reveal realities that transcend it. This separation results in a further separation of the order of intelligence from what Schindler calls the order of holiness.<sup>44</sup> This separation has two consequences. It leads to the secularization of intelligence. The believer in God begins to view the world in the same way that an atheist does. Faith is no longer a source of knowledge about the world. The question “why” is no longer a respectable question to ask in dealing with the world. The disappearance of the question “why” in its various forms (“what is the meaning of my life?” or “for what am I living?”) leads to an alienation of man from himself. He thinks as if God did not exist. The second consequence of the separation of the order of nature from the order of the supernatural is what Schindler has called the “voluntarizing” of holiness.<sup>45</sup> The process of secularization produces within the believer a dichotomy. He may be very faithful in religious practices, but he lives his life as if God did not exist. As one wag has put it: We are brothers and sisters in church, but fourth cousins in the parking lot. Schindler has pointed out that this accommodation of religious belief to the framework of secularized intelligence is “what Nietzsche meant when he announced the ‘death of God’ in the midst of [what was then] a plenitude of relatively full churches.”<sup>46</sup> Schindler goes on to say: “The divorce of the mind from holiness – which is to say, the separation of the order of intelligence from God and the loss consequently of an intelligent sense of God – lie[s] at the heart of the contemporary cultural crisis which John Paul II has framed in terms of a growing ‘culture of death,’ and identifies as a ‘structure of sin.’”<sup>47</sup>

A second presupposition of secularism is the separation of the mind from the heart. Without a real relationship with God, human intelligence is transmuted into rationalism and the mind is forced to think outside of the categories of love and the self-donation that love implies. Isolated from the knowledge that faith gives, the human mind is forced to depend on

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<sup>44</sup> David L. Schindler, “Trinity, Creation, and the Order of Intelligence in the Modern Academy,” *Communio*, 28 (2001) 406-428.

<sup>45</sup> Schindler, 419.

<sup>46</sup> Schindler, 419.

<sup>47</sup> Schindler, 419-20.

its own resources that reduces its capacity to be objective in its search for the meaning of things, which is the truth. Besides suffering a rationalistic reduction, secular reason also becomes mechanistic in the manner in which it understands order or relationship in the world. Lacking a sense of the ultimate reason for things, order is seen as the extrinsic relationship that autonomous individuals have to one another in virtue of some extrinsic power or will to dominate others. Lacking a sense of the intrinsic order of things, the rationalistic mind perceives only discrete individuals that have to be put together from outside in order to produce order. Order is then seen as imposed on reality by the strong, rather than as received by all as a gift from God. Secularism rejects the notion of receptivity on the part of the creature, which in theological terms is called Marian receptivity. In its place is the exultation of the principle of power by which and extrinsic order is imposed on the world. This order always involves the violence necessary to maintain the extrinsic unity. Since there is no intrinsic order to the universe, reason, in accomplishing this task of ordering the universe, is forced to choose among options that in the final analysis are arbitrary since they are simply the preferences of those who have the power in society.<sup>48</sup>

A third presupposition of secularism is the methodological agnosticism that it proposes with regard to the truth of any given meaning of the world and of human life. Since it embraces the empirical method as the sole avenue to truth, secular reason with its scientific method is incapable of answering the question “why.” It brackets the question of ultimate truth and adopts the position of relativism which it presents as the virtue of tolerance of all opinions. In order to accomplish this goal, secularized intelligence privileges form over content. Schindler observes: “The hallmark of these modern (post-Enlightenment) methodologies, first of all, is their ‘formal-critical’ nature. These methodologies typically grant primacy to form over content, thus primacy being understood as the necessary condition

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<sup>48</sup> Schindler, 422.

for not prejudging the meaning and truth of the world. The hallmark of these methodologies, in other words, is their insistence both on the inquirer's *a priori* neutrality with respect to any content of meaning or truth, and on the inquirer's (methodical) control in determining that content. (Francis Bacon and [René] Descartes, in their very different ways, can be mentioned as paradigms here, with their insistence that we must first remove 'idols' or anteriorly accepted beliefs, or again first presume doubt as the most fundamental condition of intelligent inquiry.)"<sup>49</sup>

This methodology end up by imposing on the academy a dogmatic relativism, but it cloaks its agenda of relativism by labeling those who hold to the existence of ultimate truths as individuals who are intolerant, thereby confusing the proper subjects of tolerance, human persons, with the proposed answers that they give to questions of ultimate meaning. Persons deserve tolerance; the content of the answers they propose to ultimate questions does not. It must raise or fall on the basis of its adherence to the truth. By denying the capacity of the human mind to reach conclusions about ultimate truth, secularism ends up making a further contribution to human alienation.

A fourth presupposition is the anthropological dualism that makes a distinction between me and my body and between the person and his or her body. In this fashion there is an original alienation of the person from his own body. The body then becomes instrumental for the achievement of the private ends of the person. In a critique of this present-day culture, John Paul II writes: "Within this same cultural climate, the body is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality; it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency. Consequently, sexuality too is depersonalized and exploited: from being the sign, place and

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<sup>49</sup> Schindler, 417.

language of love, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another, in all the other's richness as a person, it increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts. Thus the original import of human sexuality is distorted and falsified, with the two meanings [of sexuality, the] unitive and procreative, inherent in the very nature of the conjugal act, are artificially separated: in this way the marriage union is betrayed and its fruitfulness is subjected in the caprice of the couple...."<sup>50</sup> In a culture of this type, marriage is not rooted in the irrevocable mutual self-donation of the body, but rather is a free association of autonomous individuals who are able to dissolve at will their voluntary union. A marriage exists only as long as both parties want it to exist. In this context, divorce, as the plenary solution for difficult cases, is not only possible but also desirable.

A fifth presupposition of secular reason regards the nature of justice. Without any intrinsic way to account for order in its moral universe, secular reason lacks an intrinsic account of what constitutes justice. Before the Enlightenment, justice was conceived principally in terms of what was due to others. The just man gave to others what was their due. After the Enlightenment, the focus shifted to rights and the claims that the individual has on others in order to account for justice.

A sixth presupposition of secular reason is the nature of freedom. Freedom is the ability to make choices. What the content of the choice is does not enter into the notion of freedom. For this reason, secular reason is capable of making a distinction between being "pro-choice" and being "pro-abortion." The question of legalizing abortion is proposed, not based on the merits or demerits of abortion itself, but rather on the value of freedom of choice. Those who oppose abortion are labeled as being "anti-choice." In this fashion secular reason privileges form over content in morality. What is important in this view is the

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<sup>50</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 23, as cited by Schindler, 421.



freedom to choose; little or no thought is given to what is chosen since the connection of freedom with the truth has been severed.

## VII. Conclusions

The crisis (often unrecognized) that the contemporary secular university faces is that it has no way to unify its pursuit of knowledge. By banning theology from its curriculum, it has abandoned the search for ultimate meaning. By admitting only the empirical sciences to its curriculum, the secular university has deprived itself of the ability to ask the question “why.” Departments of philosophy, where they exist, often structure the courses offered in such a way that avoids controversy. In an environment that is hostile to controversy, professors lecture in order to secure the agreement of their students, a procedure that is closely akin to indoctrination. By contrast, a fundamental shift in the education offered by the university occurs when rational justification is its principal focus. Professors, when they explain the presuppositions of their particular viewpoints, encourage the intellectual growth of students. Students learn to think critically when the instruction offered them reconnects the lecture with dispute, and students learn why they are bound to dissent from any given lecture if they do not share the presuppositions of the lecturer. This is only possible when there is the freedom to examine the philosophical and theological presuppositions of all sides to a question. Such an examination requires the admission of contrary points of view. In this way, a dialogue among the sciences can provide the possibility to crosscheck the conclusions of one science against that of another.

The embrace of the liberal notion of rights by the women’s movement as a way of advancing the dignity of women has meant the embrace of all the presuppositions that such a notion of rights presupposes. These presuppositions, however, are at odds with a notion of

freedom that is born of a morality based on objective truth. For the awareness of this inner conflict to rise to the level of conscious reflection, a dialogue is needed with those branches of enquiry that are in competition in the task of supplying a comprehensive framework for the unification of knowledge. For those engaged in Women and Gender Studies, participation in the work of unification of knowledge will require the willingness to provide points of contact with those who propose alternative understanding of the meaning of sexual difference. The thought of John Paul II can provide a thoughtful partner for a challenging dialogue for those who are open to questions about ultimate meaning.