

RADICAL FEMININITY

by Jean Zampino

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[COMMENT: This article by Jean Zampino is one of the best pieces on gender issues I have come across. She has a sense of the true feminine which is rare among Christian writers. See also [Psychology, Salvation, and the Ordination of Women](#) by E. Fox.]

RADICAL FEMININITY – PART I.

In October of last year, while attending the House of Bishops' meeting in Kansas City with my husband, the Lord spoke two words to me which I have been pondering ever since. The words are radical femininity.

Our society has been poisoned by radical feminists for over forty years. Feminists have been a strong force behind both the abortion movement and the homosexual agenda; they have championed the cause of "emancipating" women from the "drudgery" of homemaking and child rearing in order to be "fulfilled" in the work place; they have promoted day-care centers; they have pushed to redefine family to include unmarried heterosexual partnerships, serial partnerships, and homosexual partnerships; they have actively participated in revamping our educational system which now indoctrinates our nation's children with a revisionist account of history, with moral relativism, and with sexual immorality. Not only has this ungodly and abhorrent feminist position infiltrated our country, it has now been exported worldwide.

Because the feminist movement is so radical, the call to true femininity based upon Judeo-Christian values must also be radical. It is high time for Christians who have slowly, perhaps unwittingly, been drawn into this modern cultural revolution to open our eyes, recognize the lies we have been fed, and take positive action. Since women have played such a prominent role in creating the problem which now exists, it is imperative that godly women play a major role in reversing these damaging trends. Remember our first mother, Eve, led our race into original sin, but it was through a young virgin, Mary, that God sent His Son into the world to redeem us.

Radical femininity functions in an entirely different way from the feminism of our day. It does not parade itself across the evening news, scream obscenities, arm-twist politicians, or belittle womanhood and childbearing. Nor does it play the victim, push for "equal rights," or denigrate men.

Certainly God created woman equal with man in many important ways: she is equal before God as a unique person; she is equal in dignity; she is created in God's image as is her male counterpart; she has equal access to spiritual life with God; she is equally able to hear God's voice and have a personal relationship with Him.

But woman was also created different than man. In addition to the obvious biological differences, man and woman are different in every cell of their bodies! Man was given physical strength and endurance in order to carry out his God given role of protector and defender. He tends to be more single-focused, more rational and less intuitive than woman, more alert to danger and more adventuresome than his female counterpart. These gifts enable man to take initiative and to lead, which is his God-given role.

Woman, on the other hand, was endowed with a beauty, softness, and gentleness not present in man. She tends to be more intuitive and more relational, and thereby is gifted to be a nurturer, a comforter, and a binder-up of wounds. She is multi-task oriented, an essential ingredient for motherhood and homemaking. The very nature of her physical body points to the fact that she is designed to be a "receiver" and a "responder." And, although feminists refuse to acknowledge this fact, woman has less physical strength and endurance than man. In this regard she is the weaker sex.

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However, weakness is not a flaw, an imperfection, or a trait to be looked down upon. Far from that, Scripture tells us that God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Woman's weakness often enables her to more easily be dependent upon God than her male counterpart who tends to rely on his own strength and remain "in command" of all situations.

Since we have been so warped by our disintegrating culture, we must pray that all secular and worldly thoughts be eliminated, and that we be given "supernatural lenses" to see true femininity as God created it to be. As we look deeper into the divine gift of femininity, I want to focus on five areas: (1) the Privilege of Womanhood, (2) the Mystery of Womanhood, (3) the Supernatural Mission of Womanhood, (4) the Power of Womanhood, and (5) the Sacrament of Marriage. The first two will be addressed in this newsletter, the rest in the next issue.

I. THE PRIVILEGE OF WOMANHOOD.

God has given woman a privileged role in both creation and redemption. It was Mary, a virgin teenager, to whom the angel Gabriel announced the coming of the Messiah, the Savior of the World. She received the word from the angel and totally surrendered herself as the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, and the Son of God was conceived and carried in her womb. No man was present for this most sublime announcement in history. Joseph was later told of Mary's miraculous conception in a dream. In creation, woman is given the incredible honor of having a womb and of symbolizing in her body the bringing forth of life. If she conceives a child she has the awesome privilege of being touched by God as He places an immortal soul within her womb at conception. She then has the joy of carrying this child for nine months, nourishing his little body with her own, and in the fullness of time, joining with the sufferings of Christ through the pangs of childbirth as she brings forth a child created in the image of God -there could be no greater gift to woman.

The New Testament gives many accounts of the high value God places upon woman. Ponder the Visitation. Upon arriving at the home of her elderly cousin Elizabeth, who was three months from giving birth to John the Baptist, Mary greeted Elizabeth, and the soon-to-be-born prophet within her womb leaped for joy at the presence of the newly conceived Son of God, and both child and mother were immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. These two women were the only ones granted the privilege of understanding exactly what was going on.

Consider the fact that aside from the disciple John, who ran from the Garden of Gethsemane but returned to the Lord's side at the Crucifixion, it was women who stood by Jesus and supported Him during His agonizing death. And it was to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that Jesus first appeared on the Day of His Resurrection.

Jesus not only spoke to the woman at the well in Samaria, but He revealed His Messiahship to her. This was astonishing in itself because she was not only a Samaritan, looked down upon by the Jews, but she was a woman, and one living in sexual sin. Let us also recall Jesus' tenderness toward the woman caught in adultery. His words, *"He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone"* and *"neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more"* have spread the hope of forgiveness down through the ages.

And let us never forget the high regard He had for the love and emotion lavishly poured out upon Him by both the woman who anointed His head at Bethany, and the one who washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair at the home of a Pharisee. His mercy toward the "unclean" woman with the issue of blood, who risked grave punishment in order to touch the hem of her Savior's garment, is another example of our Lord's high esteem for womanhood. Jesus is truly woman's ally.

So women, let us refuse the evil lies which denigrate woman. Let us not seek to become more like man, to strive to do the things man does, or to belittle our womanhood. Let us walk humbly and joyfully in the privileged position God has given us and radiate His love as we go about our daily tasks. This is radical femininity, and it is a sacred calling.

II. THE MYSTERY OF WOMANHOOD.

There is a certain mysterious quality about woman. God created her to be intuitive, relational, and integrated in body and soul, and unless she has been wounded by life's circumstances, she tends to be very much in touch with her feelings. All of life is connected for her; outward events have inner meaning and therefore produce a variety of feelings sometimes difficult to interpret. Man - being created more rational, single-focused, and task-oriented - often becomes exasperated trying to understand her because she views life so differently!

If we take a look at woman's physical body, we see perhaps her greatest mystery and can understand more of the supernatural mission which God has given her. The intimate organs of woman are not visible; they are hidden. "What is hidden usually refers to something mysterious, something that should be carefully protected from indiscreet looks. The very structure of [a woman's] body symbolizes a garden that should be carefully guarded, for the keys of the garden belong to God. It is His property in a special sense and is to be kept untouched"¹ until He allows the bride to give those keys to her bridegroom, after their sacramental covenant of marriage.

Song of Solomon 4:12 speaks beautifully of this: "*A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.*" It is significant that the bride is first seen by her bridegroom as "sister." This indicates that the husband loves his bride first and foremost as a unique person for her own sake. He grows in love with her interior personhood before daring to ask to be invited into the very depths of her body and soul, into her mystery in the marital embrace.

John Paul II writes, "*The metaphors ... 'garden enclosed, fountain sealed' reveal [that the woman is] master of her own mystery.*"² The woman holds the keys to her garden. The lover is to enter the woman's inner sanctuary only with the utmost care and with her express permission. He must not barge in, manipulate, or coerce the keys from her hand. Love never violates the one who is loved. That which violates is lust, which is the unholy counterfeit of love. The woman, on the other hand, must not give her keys to anyone except the husband God has given her, and then only after the nuptial vows have been made.

To understand more clearly the woman's mysterious enclosed garden, we must look at the Incarnation, the greatest event in all of history. God became man and was hidden for nine months in the womb of the Virgin Mary. "*She carried in the temple of her female organs the King of the Universe Whom the whole universe cannot contain,*"³ and the event was cloaked in silence and veiled in mystery.

Woman's intimate organs are not only "hidden;" they are also "veiled." Moses veiled his face after being in the presence of God. The glory of God shone upon his face and the Israelites could not stand to look upon it. In many churches, the tabernacle containing the consecrated Bread and Wine, the Body and Blood of our Lord, is also veiled to indicate its holiness, its sacredness. The woman's body is a tabernacle, prepared and ready, although silently hidden and veiled, to carry within it a new life stamped with God's image in which He silently places an immortal soul.

It is for these reasons that a woman must not betray her mystery. She must be a guardian of purity, not staining her precious gift by flaunting her sexuality in the way she dresses, the way she carries herself, or by her thoughts, speech, or actions. Because woman has been entrusted with such a deep and profound mystery, and because her body and soul are so united, when she betrays her purity, she wounds herself very deeply. She also wounds the Church and society at large. By lacking understanding of this sacred mystery and by betraying her purity, woman can undermine society – and indeed has. This is why Satan attacks so severely in the area of a woman's sexuality.

However, for each woman who has fallen into sexual impurity, or who has been injured sexually by others, let us remember the mercy and forgiveness of our God. Just as Jesus dealt honestly but gently with the woman caught in adultery, so does He desire to deal with each woman whose garden has been trampled by sexual sins. Jesus wants to lift you up; to destroy the weeds of guilt and shame, of self-condemnation and self-hatred, of anger, vindictiveness and of lust; and to heal the pain, the

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deep wounds that feel like they will never go away. He wants to bring you to the place of forgiving yourself and those who have caused you pain. When He is finished, He will ask you, as the tender of your garden, the guardian of your hidden and veiled holy tabernacle, to gently close and latch the door ... and to hold on to those keys until He allows you to give them to your bridegroom under the sacred vows of sacramental marriage, or until you are united with Him in a sacred vow of celibacy, or until you are united with Him forever at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Radical femininity recognizes our God-given femininity as sacred in that we were created in God's image; in the physical we were designed to receive the gift of life within our womb, to carry another immortal soul under our heart for nine months and to bring this new life into the world; in the spiritual we were designed to bring forth life in every area of our lives, to imprint all we do with our feminine nature, and to nurture the weak and helpless. Radical femininity means walking in this truth, regardless of past sins we have committed or abuses we have sustained; it means rising up in the forgiveness and mercy of God, and by His grace, walking forward in purity and righteousness.

1 Alice von Hildebrand, *The Privilege of Being a Woman* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sapientia Press, 2002), 82.

2 Christopher West, A Crash Course in *The Theology of the Body Study Guide* (Carpentersville, IL: the GIFT Foundation, 2002), 61.

3 von Hildebrand, 65.

RADICAL FEMININITY – PART II

In our last newsletter, we looked at woman's high and sacred calling to radical femininity in an era of ungodly and radical feminism. We discussed how the feminist agenda has been used by Satan to tear down our society, and how womanhood, as created by God, has been maligned and subverted. The primary attack has come upon woman's pivotal role in living out the beauty and purity, the mystery and sacredness of her womanhood. All that is truly feminine – the loveliness of her body, the sacredness of the fruit of her womb, her ability to nurture, her intuitiveness and relational skills – has been denigrated, sneered at, and belittled.

Perhaps the most damaging of all has been the assault on woman's sexuality, and the immorality which that attack has brought about. Frederica Mathewes-Green writes, "*Reproduction rights*" (meaning the right to kill unborn children) is the evil outcome of this vicious attack. In striving for equality with man, woman has all but destroyed herself. As professor Sidney Callahan has said, '*We will never climb to equality over the dead bodies of our own children.*'"¹

We spoke last time of the ways in which God created man and woman equal (no striving is necessary to gain this equality!) and of how man and woman are different and complementary. We then looked briefly at *The Privilege of Womanhood* and *The Mystery of Womanhood*. Now we will turn our attention to three other important areas: (3) the supernatural mission of womanhood, (4) the power of womanhood, and (5) the Sacrament of Marriage.

III. THE SUPERNATURAL MISSION OF WOMANHOOD.

Feminists insist that woman will never find her true fulfillment in the menial tasks of motherhood and homemaking. This is the secular view touted by those who are "enlightened" in our modern world. Secularists are unable, and often unwilling, to look to the God who created us for His supernatural mission for woman, which is to bring forth life and to be a guardian of all that is holy and sacred regarding this noble task.

Motherhood is the high calling of every woman whether or not she is ever a biological mother. Every woman has been given nurturing skills and has been called to bring forth life - abundant life - spiritual as well as physical. Woman's very soul is maternal.

4 Can '*Prenatal* and '*Perinatal Education*' as well as '*Spiritual Electroplating*' change the world into a better one where peace and justice reign? – WWW.LETSCREATEHEAVENONEARTH.COM

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God created in woman the gift of receptivity, which is an active response not a passive one. Her receptivity is a giving of herself, a self-donation. It is not a passive succumbing to the aggression of others. Rather, it is an imitation of God's love which is never self-seeking, but always self-giving, laying down one's life for another. The married woman joyfully gives herself to her husband in order to become fruitful by him, to conceive in her womb a new life with an immortal soul created in God's image. Then she continues to love as God loves as she nurtures this child with her own body and walks through the pangs of childbirth to bring this new creation into the world. Her self-giving love then nurtures this little one through each step along the path to manhood or womanhood. Mothering - being maternal - means to nurture, to reach out to the helpless, the small, the weak. This is why abortion not only murders the innocent unborn child, but it spiritually destroys the mother as well, tearing to shreds her sacred call to maternity.

Even though as adults we often forget the pain and suffering our mothers endured to bring us forth and the sacrifices they made on our behalf throughout the years, even though we drift away from our mothers for any number of reasons, when the going gets tough, our inner beings cry out for our mother. My father-in-law, who fought at the Battle of the Bulge in World War II, attests to the fact that many soldiers cried out for their mothers as they were breathing their last breath.

In the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, there is a poignant scene when Mary breaks through the crowd and drops to the ground to meet her Son face to face as He falls under the weight of the cross. Their deep exchange was unfathomable, but I believe I heard her say, "My son, I am here." Then there was a flashback to Jesus' childhood where He fell and Mary ran to comfort Him and kiss His wound. Mary, mother of the Son of God, was modeling for all women their supernatural, God-given mission.

When woman ceases to walk in her divine mission, society crumbles. To swim against the tide of our degenerating culture, let us as Christian women fulfill our sacred calling to bring forth and nurture life in whatever way God may lead us. Let us stand against the culture of death by proclaiming life in all we do, day after day. This is radical femininity.

IV. THE POWER OF WOMANHOOD.

The power of woman to influence mankind should never be underestimated. This God-given power may be corrupted and used for evil and destruction, as we see in the Garden of Eden with Eve and in the royal court of King Ahab with Jezebel, or it can be used for good and for the building up of society as we see in the lives of St. Catherine of Siena and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Woman's greatest strength lies in her moral character. When she uses this strength wisely, her ability to undergird her husband and nurture her children, her sensitivity to God, and her commitment to prayer can turn the tide of society. Indeed, society is safe when woman is walking in her godly femininity, carrying out her supernatural mission.

In *"The Dragon Seed"*, Pearl S. Buck quotes Confucius, *"Where the woman is faithful, no evil can befall. The woman is the root and the man is the tree. The tree grows only as high as the root is strong."*² Later she writes, *"The strongest thing on earth is a woman."*³ Mother Virginia, the retired superior of All Saints Convent in Catonsville, Maryland, teaches the same thing. She states that a woman can either double or half a man. How true! Woman has the power to call out the best in a man, not by nagging, manipulating, or commanding, but by her godly example, encouragement, gentle persuasion, wisdom, and discernment – all sanctified by a life of prayer. When she lives up to her calling, when she loves as Christ loves, her influence on her family, church, and society is immeasurable. What she lacks in physical strength, she more than compensates for in moral character.

How misleading is the feminist push to be equal to (meaning the same as) men. Woman wields far more power when she is walking in her true femininity. She has the power to shape and mold the hearts and souls of men, no small task. Walking in radical femininity means focusing on our

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relationship with God, being attentive to the formation of our own souls, and building our own moral character so that we can rightly influence others and bring life to our culture of death.

V. THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE.

Celibacy for the kingdom of God is a vocation given to some and is a gift to the Church. It declares to the world that man's ultimate desire for union can only be satisfied in God, and thereby, it declares the spiritual nature of marital union. However, the primary vocation God has created in order to live out our masculinity and femininity is the first sacrament initiated by God and the bedrock of society: marriage. A sacrament makes visible that which is invisible. The nuptial union between man and woman is a visible sign of the ultimate union between God and man. God created us – male and female – for union with Him; He wants to betroth us to Himself forever (Hosea 2:19). He desires to marry us! Therefore God has stamped this message into our bodies (which are visible) to help us see the reality of our ultimate union with God (which is as yet invisible).

A man's physical body makes no sense by itself; neither does the woman's physical body make sense by itself. But seen in the light of each other, we see a call to the holy communion of love, the deep, eternal love which exists within the Trinity itself. Man and woman were both made in God's image, and in the love expressed in the spousal embrace, they represent the union God has with His Church.

The New Testament is the story of the Eternal Bridegroom (Jesus Christ) who became incarnated in the flesh of a man, who gave up His body for His bride (the Church) so that we could become one flesh with Him.

Genesis 2:24 says, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* Jesus left His Father in heaven and His mother on earth to be joined to His Church. Marital love is a reminder to the world of what Christ did, giving His body out of love for His bride. Every act of marital conjugal love is symbolic of this profound mystery, referring to Christ and His Church and foreshadowing the eternal union with Christ.

God calls us to love as God loves by giving ourselves as a gift to one another. As we receive God's love and abide in it day by day, we become transformed by that love and can then give the gift of authentic love to one another. This authentic, self-giving love is clearly expressed in marital conjugal love. The eternal mystery of Christ's union of love with His Church can only be symbolized within the Sacrament of Marriage, and most profoundly, within the conjugal act itself, when husband and wife share a heart attitude of giving themselves to one another as a gift.

Pope John Paul II strongly contends that our rejection of God's plan for life and love which God stamped in our bodies as male and female is at the root of all evil.⁴ If the body was created by God to reveal and make visible, to symbolize, the divine mystery of union with God, where do you think Satan will attack? Evil is the distortion of that which is good and beautiful. Immorality is the counterfeit of the marital union. It is taking for oneself, not giving of oneself; it is lust, not love. The things which are the most sacred are those which are most violently profaned. And nothing is more profaned in our culture than our human sexuality.

Christopher West shares the following understanding of sexuality in our culture. The word symbolic (Greek: *syμβalein*) means to unite, bring together, gather up; while the word diabolic (Greek: *diabolein*) means to break apart, scatter, rupture. *"God's eternal plan for the body is union, communion, marriage; this brings life. Satan's counter-plan for the body is separation, fracture, divorce; this brings death. A fallen world, then, is a world of estranged spouses: estrangement between divinity and humanity; heaven and earth; soul and body; spirituality and sexuality; sacredness and sensuality; masculinity and femininity."*⁵ Jesus Christ, through His Incarnation, His coming-in-the-flesh, has unified spirit and flesh. He has healed the rupture between body and soul which occurred at the Fall. Therefore, we can, by our own free will and with the grace of God, reject the diabolical estrangement of the fallen world and walk in all that is good and pure and holy, in all that symbolizes the divine mystery of love between Christ and His Church.

⁶ Can **'Prenatal and Perinatal Education'** as well as **'Spiritual Electroplating'** change the world into a better one where peace and justice reign? – WWW.LETSCREATEHEAVENONEARTH.COM

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Now let us turn to St. Paul's magnificent, although misunderstood and often maligned, teaching on marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33. Here we have the powerful head and body analogy: "*For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church ...*" (vs. 23). The husband, then, is a symbol, an icon of Christ, and the wife is an icon of the Church. The husband is to mirror Christ and love his wife as Christ loved His Church and laid down His life for her in self-sacrificing, self-giving love. The wife is to receive that gift of love and respond by giving herself totally in love, as did Mary, the mother of the Church and our example of radical, sacred femininity.

St. Paul goes further - and the feminists, who have no understanding of giving oneself to another as a gift of love, revolt at this statement - "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ... Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything*" (vs 21 & 24 NIV). St. Paul does not hate women, nor does he advocate male domination or subjection to tyranny. Christopher West points out that a word study of submission gives us insight on this passage: the prefix "sub" means "under" while "mission" means one who is sent with authority to perform a particular service. The wife, then, is under the mission of her husband. And what is that mission? To love his wife!⁶ Pope John Paul II states it this way: "*In imaging Christ and the Church, 'the husband is above all he who loves, and the wife, on the other hand, is she who is loved.'*"⁷ Thus we can conclude that 'the wife's "submission" to her husband, understood in the context of the entire passage ... signifies above all 'the experiencing of love.' All the more so since this 'submission' is related to the image of the submission of the Church to Christ, which certainly consists in experiencing His love."⁷

Radical femininity, then, consists of receiving authentic, life-giving, healing love from our Lord Jesus Christ, and, for married women, from our husbands. This is the sublime plan God has designed for woman which secularists so violently oppose and seek to denigrate. We must stand against the forces of evil with the armor of Christ surrounding us, and we must stand in prayer for those whose eyes remain closed to the truth.⁸

Let us also pray that men and women alike will come to see the beauty, mystery, and influence of woman as God created her to be; that her supernatural mission to bring forth and nurture life will be seen as a sacred calling and held in reverence; that God's glorious plan for marriage and all that it symbolizes will be understood and hallowed; and that the fruit of woman's womb – a precious child with an immortal soul – will be loved and protected. What a joy and privilege it is to walk in radical, sacred femininity!

Much of the material on "*The Supernatural Mission of Womanhood*" and the "*The Power of Womanhood*" was adapted from "*The Privilege of Being a Woman*" by Alice von Hildebrand. Much of the material on "*The Sacrament of Marriage*" has been adapted from the work of Christopher West's "*A Crash Course in the Theology of the Body*" tapes and study guide, 2nd edition.

1 Frederica Mathewes-Green, "*Twice Liberated: A Personal Journey Through Feminism*" Touchstone Magazine (Summer, 1994).

2 As quoted by Alice von Hildebrand in *The Privilege of Being a Woman* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sapientia Press, 2002), 28.

3 Ibid, 28.

4 Christopher West, *A Crash Course in the Theology of the Body tapes and study guide*, 2nd edition (Carpentersville, IL: The GIFT Foundation, 2002), 6.

5 West, 5.

6 Christopher West, *A Crash Course in the Theology of the Body, The Sacramentality of Marriage*, Tape 8 (Carpentersville, IL: The GIFT Foundation, 2002).

7 West, as quoted in *A Crash Course in the Theology of the Body*, Study Guide, 51.

8 It is interesting to note that St. Paul placed the great call to arm for battle – Ephesians 6 – following the powerful statements for the holiness of marriage in Ephesians 5. (I guess he knew it would be a fierce battle.)

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(F) = also in French available; (D) = also in German available

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