

The Domestic Church

A Journal of Catholic Family Spirituality + Summer 1996 + Vol.I, No.2



In a recent papal address, Pope John Paul II called on women to advocate proper portrayals of femininity in the various media. In an effort to keep stride with the Pope's request, as well as to provide a complimentary feature to *Spiritual Fatherhood*, which focuses on masculinity and male roles, *The Domestic Church* introduces in this issue *A Woman's Place*.

On a number of occasions, the Pope has emphasized the need for a well-informed laity. Whether she is mother or grandmother, aunt or big sister, the woman in the domestic church ought to be clear about her particular role and mission. She should be able to share the substance of this mission, as well as defend it. An excerpt from an address delivered by Dr. Alice von Hildebrand will provide the content of this issue's *A Woman's Place*. It is hoped that this presentation will assist in undergirding women's sense of their mission at home and at church and in society.

Of course, men also benefit from a clarified definition of femininity. Men hereby have light shed upon an aspect of their own religious life. For, as visiting writer for *Spiritual Fatherhood*, Father Gerald A. Buckley, O.P. stresses in quoting Saint Theresa of Avila, "Every creature is female before God." In addition, men are called, like women, to confidently defend the dignity and beauty of the Church's teaching on masculinity and femininity. May *The Domestic Church* aid you in this endeavor.

Ruth Andreas
Editor

A Woman's Place

Dr. Alice Von Hildebrand

What follows is an excerpt from an address delivered by Dr. Alice Von Hildebrand at Human Life International's 8th World Conference on Love, Life and Family, in Miami, Florida, April 18-22, 1990. Printed with permission

"...We are told that the woman was the last being to be created. When you study Genesis you are going to see that, in the process of creation, there's a sort of ascending line: starting with inanimate matter, going to plants and animals, man and finally the woman... Moreover, we are told that the woman had a particularly noble origin. Whereas Adam's body was fashioned from the clay of the earth (a very modest origin), the woman was formed from man's body. In other words, the woman is the only body fashioned from the body of a person made to God's image. No doubt, this gives to woman a very particular dignity. Moreover, she was created to be man's companion, indicating thereby that love was going to be one of her very particular missions.

Now, whereas there is absolute and complete metaphysical equality between men and women, they are very different in their spiritual, psychological, intellectual and biological structures. And this is why they are so admirably complimentary.

Now came the tragedy of original sin. We are told that the devil addressed himself to the woman; and the fathers of the church give an interpretation. And, as this interpretation is not 'de fide' I dare to challenge it. The fathers of the church said the devil addressed himself to the woman because she was the weaker, and he had a better chance of achieving success. I say the devil, being extremely clever addressed himself to the woman because he knew full well that once she gave in, Adam was not going to put up much

of a resistance. And you will notice that he did not; he immediately gave in. She gave him the apple and he ate it.

You will also notice that the punishments were fearful. We lost God's grace. We lost all the preternatural gifts that we had received. Our intellects were darkened, both men and women; our wills weakened; our hearts became colder. We are subject to death, suffering and pain.

But nevertheless, there were very different punishments inflicted upon the man and the woman; because Adam was supposed to earn his bread with the sweat of his brow, whereas a woman was punished in the sphere that was a very special privileged: to give birth. Moreover, she was subject to her husband, had to carry her children in anguish and give birth in pain. There's absolutely no doubt about the fact that she was more severely punished than the man was. That is the sad part of the story.

We are told that God was to put an enmity between the serpent and the woman, between his seed and her seed. Do you notice that men are not mentioned? And now comes the good news: the annunciation. The Angel Gabriel comes to Nazareth to a virgin and announces that she was going to be the mother of Jesus. The holy angel addressed himself to a woman. Saint Joseph is not informed; not a word about him or about what Mary is supposed to tell him. This tremendous event, the greatest in history takes place unknown to man.

And then comes the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation where we are told that a great portent appeared in

heaven: a woman clothed with the sun with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And at the same time there's another portent: a red dragon. And the woman is with child; and the dragon is after her, eager to devour the newborn baby. Once again, you see the duel between the dragon and the woman.

Now this indicated very clearly the metaphysical position of the woman, the religious position of the woman: a choice between sin or redemption, between Eve or Mary. Therefore, I claim that the woman's position is crucial. And this is why the French writer Vinet said that the value of a society is to be gauged according to the value of its women.

In the course of history, women have heavily expiated for their sin. The famous Danish writer Søren Kierkegaard says, "It is my conviction that if it was a woman that ruined man, it was woman also that has fairly and honestly made reparation, and still does." This is why, according to Kierkegaard, men either look up to women or down on them, but they never feel equal. He expresses this thought by the following words: "If one would indicate the purest and most perfect quality, one says a woman. If one would indicate the weakest and the most feeble, one says a woman. If one would give the notion of a spiritual quality raised above all sensuousness, one says a woman. If one would indicate innocence in all its lofty greatness, one says a woman. If one would point to the depressing feeling of sin, one says a woman."

In the life of revelation, it is clear that the woman has a special affiliation with the religious sphere, with the drama of redemption. If she fails, she will be man's downfall. If she succeeds with God's grace to fulfill her role, she will help man to become Christ like. This is the either/or of the woman's life.

Now therefore, I'm going to defend the thesis that her role in society is essentially religious. What do I mean when I say that her mission is essentially religious? Let me mention some typical religious features or religious categories. The first one I'd like to mention is receptivity. By nature a woman is receptive, not primarily active. This particular feature finds perfect expression in the sexual sphere, which is very deep and so very meaningful, which is not merely biological but which is an expression of basic spiritual attitudes. A woman is not passive, she is self-giving. And this self-giving implies an act of transcendence, an opening of oneself to another, a collaboration with another, a synchronization...

In the act of conceiving a woman receives from a man an invisible seed, and nine months later she gives him back a human being, a human person made to God's image that is going to live forever because he possesses an immortal soul. Let us not forget that this is the advantage that women have over men in the religious sphere, that towards God all human beings are females, and that men must learn this receptivity towards divine grace in order to find salvation. All of us must recognize

that we need to be fecundated. And this is something which is easy for a woman to understand because, as I said her nature has made her to be essentially receptive..

If we look at things on a purely secular plane, and this is very tempting today because we live in a completely secularized society, it looks as if the woman were truly in an inferior position. She is less strong, she is less creative, she has to carry her children in pain, she gives birth in anguish. But supernaturally speaking, the position is totally reversed. And then you can say that women have some sort of an edge precisely because of this receptivity.

The famous Italian German writer Romano Guardini says, "Christianity has always placed the life struggling for inner truth and ultimate love above that intent on exterior action, even the most courageous and excellent, has always valued silence more highly than word, purity of intent more than success, the magnanimity of love more than the effect of labor." In other words, to be religious is to recognize the absolute priority of being over action. And this is precisely the particular role and mission of women, not so much to create, to produce, to be active, to make the headlines but to be what they ought to be in God's light.

This sheds light upon the fact that Saint Peter of Alcantara and St. Theresa of Avila both say that more women than men are granted mystical graces. Because in order to recover these mystical gifts one needs to be receptive to the divine calling. One

must be ready to give oneself completely and totally and be more willing or totally willing to make sacrifices.

The key role of women in society has even been grasped in pagan societies in which women have often been so abominably treated, downgraded, persecuted. In one of her novels, Pearl Buck has one of her characters saying (referring to Confucius); 'The strongest thing on earth is a woman. Let us be glad that the enemies are men and not women for when women conquer the men are lost indeed.'

The other religious categories that I'd like to mention briefly are second, silence; third, interiority; fourth, contemplation; fifth, a spirit of sacrifice. These are some keys to religious life. And this is why, to quote Pearl Buck again: 'When woman is faithful, no evil can befall for the woman is the root, and man is the tree. And the tree grows only as high as the root is strong.'

There are quite a few men in history who have acknowledged the moral superiority that women have when they are faithful to their mission, through their spirit of sacrifice, in their readiness to suffer for others whom they love.

Cardinal Mindszenty wrote in his memoirs: 'The greatest thing on earth is a mother.' And in the Tridentine liturgy (look up in your old missals) you are going to see that on the Saturday before the fourth Sunday in September it is written: 'O God who put salvation in the hands of women!...' ■

Growing in the Faith

The Purpose of Man's Existence *(answers on page 6)*

- 6) Where do we find the chief truths taught by Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church?
- 7) Say the Apostle's Creed.
- 8) What do we mean when we say that God is the Supreme Being?
- 9) What do we mean when we say that God is eternal?
- 10) What do we mean when we say that God is all-knowing?
- 11) What do we mean when we say that God is all present?

The Baltimore Catechism

Gifts From The Magisterium

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Part I

Section Two: The Profession of the Christian Faith

Chapter I: I Believe in God the Father

Article 1: "I Believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth"

Paragraph 6. Man, III. "Male and Female He Created Them"

Equality and difference willed by God

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Man and woman have been *created*, which is to say, *willed* by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. "Being man" or "being woman" is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their creator. Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity "in the image of God." In their "being-man" and "being-woman," they reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness.

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In no way is God in Man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective "perfections" of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband.

"Each for the other" -
"A unity of two"

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God created man and woman *together* and willed each *for* the other. The Word of God gives us to understand this through various features of the sacred text. "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit from him." None of the animals can be man's partner. The woman God "fashions" from the man's rib and brings to him elicits on the man's part a cry of wonder, an exclamation of love and communion: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Man discovers woman as another "I," sharing the same humanity.

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Man and woman were made "for each other" - not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he made them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be "helpmate" to the other, for they are equal as persons ("bone of my bones . . .") and complementary as masculine and feminine. In marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming "one flesh," they can transmit human life: "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents cooperate in a unique way in the Creator's work.

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In God's plan man and woman have the vocation of "subduing" the earth as stewards of God. This sovereignty is not to be an arbitrary and destructive domination. God calls man and woman, made in the image of the Creator "who loves everything that exists," to share in his providence toward other creatures; hence their responsibility for the world God has entrusted to them. ■



The Family Bulletin Board

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

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The Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior, because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His Name. And His mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear Him. He hath showed might in His arm: He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy: as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

St. Luke 1:46-55

Spiritual Fatherhood

Father Gerald Buckley, O.P.

Fr. Gerald Buckley, O.P. is a member of the Western Dominican Province and assigned to Holy Rosary Parish in Portland, Oregon. Fr. Buckley has written articles for Homiletic and Pastoral Review, and various Catholic publications. This article builds on the basic ideas set forth in our previous article on "spiritual fatherhood".

- Mark Andreas

God is neither male nor female. Or better stated, God is supereminently both male and female, since He created all the perfection and characteristics of both sexes. Nevertheless, when God revealed Himself to His creation, He did so as Father—as male, not as female. Why is this? There must be some profound symbolism involved here in the relation of the sexes on a universal plane that transcends, and yet ordains, the relationship between the sexes on every other plane where the distinction exists.

Maleness and femaleness take their meaning from one another. God's maleness and Father-Creator, which is masculinity at its fullest, takes on meaning only over and against the femaleness of His creation. The book of Genesis tells us that the woman came forth from the man: so, on a higher plane, creation comes forth from God as the female from the male. Still, so profound is the intimacy that there is a subse-

quent reciprocity: the male comes forth from the female-mother, as God comes forth into creation from Mother Church.

Within the holy Trinity itself, God the Father is the eternal, unbegotten Source of all being. As the Source of all, the Father is the ultimate Authority. The eternal, begotten Son comes forth from the Father with characteristics that could be called female. Still, when the Son came into the world, He came not as woman but as man. This is because He came to represent the Father in His very masculinity and authority as over and against female creation.

Our Lord, then, in His divinity, is the surrogate Father of creation renewed, that is, the Church. "Full authority has been given over me in heaven and on earth." Nevertheless, as Man He is our brother creature and female. In the words of the great St. Theresa, "Every creature is female before God." Men as well as women are female before God. The masculini-

ty of the male is a borrowed representation only: it does not belong to him by rights or ultimate identification. It is a modality whereby he represents the authority of the Father in the plane of humanity. The female, on the other hand, primarily represents all creation. She is subject to the male as creation is to the Creator. Yet this is in no way a slavish subjection, but rather one of profound love and fulfillment. She finds her fullness in giving herself to the male. In like manner, the man, as male, finds his fullness only by giving himself to the woman: "Here at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." Virgins find fulfillment in giving themselves to God directly; wives to God through their husbands. Male celibates find fulfillment in giving themselves to God through Mother Church; husbands to God through their wives as representatives of Mother Church.■

Answers to Growing in the Faith

- 6) We find the chief truths taught by Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church in the Apostles' Creed.
- 7) See "The Family Bulletin Board", page 5
- 8) When we say that God is the Supreme Being we mean that He is above all creatures.
- 9) When we say that God is eternal, we mean that He always was and always will be, and always remains the same.
- 10) When we say that God is all-knowing, we mean that He knows all things, past, present, and future, even our most secret thoughts, words and actions.
- 11) When we say that God is all-present, we mean that He is everywhere.

The Annunciation

"Be it done unto me according to Thy Word"



Mission Statement

*Founded in January 1995, St. Joseph's Center for the Domestic Church
is a Catholic apostolate dedicated to serving the family.
Our mission is to help families recognize their role
as the "domestic church," the Church at home,
and to re-establish the home as a sacred refuge.*

We would like to thank our benefactors

Airport Drayage
Frank Dulcich
Gerald & Beverly Andreas
The Madeline Parish, Portland
Michael & Suzanne Dean
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*St. Joseph's Center for the Domestic Church
is a 501C3 Religious Nonprofit Organization.
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Saint Joseph's Center for the Domestic Church
P.O. Box 718
Lafayette, Oregon 97127