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Toward a Feminist Ethic of Community

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TOWARD A FEMINIST ETHIC OF COMMUNITY

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Acknowledgements</u>	1
<u>Introduction</u>	2
A clarification of the three forms of community that will be reflected upon: the family, the church and the world.	
<u>Trinity As Model of Community</u>	3
A feminist ethic of community is explored through a trinitarian vision; a historical development, a revision of natural law as the basic of ethics, and a renewal of Scripture as a source for ethic.	
<u>Reflection on the Life of the Family</u>	20
A vision of family life will take place through a critical reflection on family form depicted in the attitudes of the Christian scriptures, the patristic period, the reformation and recent Church teachings.	
<u>Reflection on the Life of the Church</u>	37
A critical reflection on liturgy and justice as it relates to the role of women, exclusive language, images of God and ecclesial unity.	
<u>Reflection on the Life of the World</u>	48
A reflection on the role of the church in the modern world as well as the attitudes and practices of people committed to the common good.	
<u>Conclusion</u>	56
The challenge of a feminist ethic of community is summarized by encouraging a new humanity where families and churches embody equality, mutuality, dignity and respect for all of creation and bear witness to God's love in the world.	
<u>Works Cited</u>	58

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INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity provides us a perfect model of community. In this thesis a trinitarian theology will frame the development of a feminist ethic of Christian community.¹ Feminist theology has shaped and contributed to the theology of ethics in recent years.² It has revisioned natural law as the basis of ethics; placed an emphasis on the social and historical context of ethics, and a renewal of Scripture as a source for ethics. These contributions will be examined as a means of imagining and re-imagining a new human community based on the values of mutuality and reciprocity.

Three forms of community life will be critically reflected upon: the life of the family, the life of the church and the life of the world. To the extent that the life of these three communities are animated by the life of God, authentic Christian community will be made visible. This investigation will provide a series of critical principles and values which can measure present relationships and arrangements within community rather than specify exact form and structure of community life.

1. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, in her book, *God For Us* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991 pp. 243-305) uses the metaphor of communion or community in developing the divine life of God with us *in* Christ and as Spirit. LaCugna develops person as defined by relation of origin ('from-another'). The divine persons are never thought of as separate from each other, as discrete individuals. The three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, "are" what they are by relation to one another.

2. Sandra Schneiders offers a useful definition of feminism as a comprehensive ideology, rooted in women's experience of sexual oppression, which engages in a critique of patriarchy, embraces an alternative vision for humanity and the earth, and actively seeks to bring this vision to realization. (*Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church*, New York: Paulist, 1991 p. 15) Feminist theology may be considered part of this quest for justice which is concerned with critical analysis and liberating retrieval of the meaning of religious tradition. Feminist theologians, while diverse in their approaches, are united in their conviction that both feminism and theology are significant for the lives women and men.

TRINITY AS MODEL OF COMMUNITY

The task of imaging and re-imaging Christian community was the work of the earliest Christian community. It was precisely the shared assumptions about power--God's power, human power, institutional power, what 'everyone knew' in the first-century Roman Empire--that were challenged by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was the new understanding of power, the power of the cross, that was, for awhile, the heartbeat of the new communal life that was being formed. This new understanding of power, the power of the cross, is articulated in Paul's first letter to the community at Corinth. Paul sternly confronts the Corinthians as they were living exclusively out of a theology of the resurrection. Paul complements this theology with an emphasis on the cross of Christ. For Paul, the cross is more than the last occurrence in the life of Jesus before the beginning of his glorious risen life. The risen and exalted Christ remains the crucified Jesus. Paul's theology of the resurrection, as evidenced in Corinthians', stresses freedom. But for Paul, the freedom is not an angelic release from the earth. It is a cruciform freedom which suffers all the indignities of human existence and struggles to transform them.³ There we see on a small scale the enactment of a 'new world' to live out the new vision of reality that the early Christians claimed to have seen, to see.⁴

By the fourth century the emperor Constantine had baptized Christianity with political respectability and very little remained of the radical reordering of human community based on the power of the cross. Simultaneously, theologians were sorting out competing christological

3. John Shea, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Allen, Texas: Thomas More, 1996) 76-77.

4. Sally B. Purvis, *The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) 13.

claims as evidenced in the Nicene creed. Early theologians, in ordering biblical language about the God who saves, present the pre-Nicene consensus that God the Father creates, redeems, and divinizes through the Son in the Spirit.⁵ Some theologians emphasized the three--God saved through Christ in the Spirit--and others the one--the first person working through the second and third persons. To avoid the subordination of the Son characteristic of the Arian heresy, the Cappadocians stated that Christ was 'eternally begotten' from the Unoriginated Origin. The prepositions *through* the Son and *in* the Spirit were replaced by *and*. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are grammatically rendered equal.⁶

The challenge by the Cappadocians to Eunomius, established the first complete trinitarian doctrine of God. Three distinctions were established. First, between *hypostasis* and *ousia*. It was now proper to distinguish between *hypostasis* and *ousia* and to speak of the one God. Second, a new distinction emerged between Fatherhood and Godhood; they were no longer synonyms. It was now possible to think of 'God' as self-differentiated: the Father is God, and the Son is God. Thirdly, the Cappadocians made person rather than substance the primary ontological category.⁷ It is that principle that stands in direct contradiction to the patriarchal idea of God as essentially unrelated. The Cappadocians rejected Eunomius's definition of God as Unbegotten and argued instead that the unoriginate God is always the Unoriginate origin: origin of the Son, of the Holy Spirit, and the world. The Cappadocians

5. Catherine Mowry Lacugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) 23.

6. Lacugna 127.

7. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us," *Freeing Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) 86.

asserted that divinity or Godhood originates with personhood (someone toward another), not with substance (something in and of itself). Love for and relationship with another is primary over autonomy, ectasis over stasis, fecundity over self-sufficiency. Thus personhood, being-in-relation-to-another, was secured as the ultimate originating principle of all reality. The metaphysical implication of the Cappadocian argument is that the divine essence derives from personhood.⁸

This new way of conceiving God greatly affected many previously held assumptions about God. For Irenaeus, Origen, the Cappadocians and other theologians of the time, God the Father was seen as the monarch (*monè archè*, sole rule or origin), the origin and cause of everything including origin and cause of Son and Spirit. The idea of the divine monarchy worked well enough as long as God and Father were synonyms and as long as the Son was seen as subordinate to the Father. However, neither is tenable if Father, Son, and Spirit are equally God.⁹ This would rule out any subordination of Christ to God. Gregory of Nazianzus resolved the tension over the monarchy with a radical proposal. He wrote, "The three most ancient opinions concerning God are Anarchia, Polyarchia, and Monarchia. Monarchy is that which we honor: not a monarchy limited to a single person but a monarchy constituted by equal dignity of nature, accord of will, identity of movement, and the return to unity of those who come from it."¹⁰

Recent feminist insights of the doctrine of the Trinity have been an impetus in imagining

8. LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us", 86-88.

9. LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us," 87-88.

10. Gregory of Nazianzus, Orat. 29.2 (quoted in LaCugna, *God For Us*, 390).

and re-imagining God as not far from our lives and living among us in a community of persons. Juan Luis Segundo interprets the Trinity as a community or society of persons in a way that leads to a socialized and interdependent understanding of human persons. It is a concept of God in which liberty, personality, and creativity take precedence over a supreme being of stability, permanence, and eternal order. His work is a 'critical approach to the God of occidental society' in which the teaching about God as independent of history, society, and world is really a projection onto God of the central limitations of Western society: individualism, passivity, and an other-worldly Christianity.¹¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna wrote the point of trinitarian theology:

to convey that it is the essence or heart of God to be in relationship to other persons; that there is no room for division or inequality or hierarchy in God; that the personal reality of God is the highest possible expression of love and freedom; that the mystery of divine life is dynamic and fecund, not static or barren.¹²

Elizabeth Johnson explored the trinitarian vision, and imagined a new human community based on the values of mutuality and reciprocity. In her book, *Consider Jesus*, Johnson writes:

The goal is not reverse discrimination, with women dominating men; that would be the same problem in reverse. Rather, the dream of a new heaven and a new earth takes hold here, with no one group being subordinated, but each person in his or her own right participating according to their gifts, with preconceived stereotyping, in genuine mutuality. It is not envisioned that everyone be the same, but that the uniqueness of each be equally respected in a community of brothers and sisters.¹³

11. Juan Luis Segundo, *Our Idea of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1974) 49, 178-179.

12. LaCugna, "God In Communion With Us," 106.

13. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus* (New York: Crossroads, 1995) 99.

The point of entry into this thesis is to move beyond the stumbling blocks that have made the doctrine of the Trinity inaccessible to some; specifically a hierarchical arrangement of the three persons of the Trinity and solely masculine images for God. Rather, the qualities of mutuality, reciprocity, cooperation, unity, and peace in genuine diversity will be embodied as they are derived from the inclusivity of the gospel message and affirmed in the writings of the Cappadocians.

One very significant turn in Catholic ethics, or moral theology, has been the inclusion of social and ethical perspectives that had been barely acknowledged in the dominant tradition, especially perspectives of economically marginalized peoples and classes. Lisa Sowle Cahill writes:

A feminist theological ethics maintains that human nature is not adequately understood without full attention to the personal and social experience of women. It advances scriptural arguments in favor both of expanded models for Christian women and of the affirmative inclusion of other oppressed groups. It also insists that issues of so-called personal ethics, such as sexuality, cannot be understood apart from their social contexts and that social institutions, like male and female gender roles, have direct and deep influence on individual decisions and actions.¹⁴

A feminist ethic bases morality on goods for persons, such as freedom, mutual love, justice, and association to the common good. However, it will constantly re-examine the status quo in light of the concrete requirements of these goods and, in particular, will enter into dialogue with diverse interpretations of the fundamental human goods.¹⁵

14. Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Feminism and Christian Ethics," *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna. (San Francisco: Harper 1993) 212.

15. Cahill, 218.

Feminist ethics have necessitated a revision of the theory of natural law. Natural law is a methodological approach that insists that human reason, reflecting on human nature and human experience, can also arrive at a true moral wisdom and knowledge that holds not only for Christians but for all people.¹⁶ The natural law approach uses as its biblical base the testimony of St. Paul: "When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse them or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all." (Romans 2: 14-16)

In his writings, *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas used this scripture as the basis of settling the question of whether or not there is a natural law. In the thirteenth century, Aquinas combined the theology of Augustine with Aristotelian philosophy to locate morality within creation and redemption, and he also gave great importance to reason and human experience in discerning specific moral values and actions. Aquinas defined the natural law as humans' innate inclination towards what promotes human fulfillment; it has been instilled in the creature by God and is knowable by reason. By reflecting on experience itself, the human person can understand what sort of personal and political life will be most fulfilling for humans and, with a somewhat lesser degree of certitude, what specific actions best fulfill in the concrete the universal moral values that can be generalized from human behavior. For instance, all human beings seek to preserve their own lives, procreate and educate their young, live in society with

16. Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, New Edition (San Francisco: Harper, 1994) 959.

others, and know the truth about God.¹⁷ While Aquinas took an inductive and flexible approach to the natural law, exhibiting caution about the absoluteness of specific conclusions from the general principles, others that followed presented an abstract, ahistorical system, which functioned to control and sanction experience rather than to reflect it.¹⁸ Ethical reflections tended to stake their authority on absolute principles, such as the primacy of procreation or the inviolability of all innocent human life, and then to derive from them specific conclusions, upon which were conferred the same absoluteness.¹⁹ The natural law approach is of lasting value for today in that it grounds an experiential morality while holding to an ideal of shared human truth, and manifests a confidence that God's will for persons is revealed in creation as an ongoing process of discovering God in human life.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Church Fathers continued the conversation on natural law. In the document, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, natural law is discovered in the depths of our conscience. It is a law which we do not impose upon ourselves, and yet it holds us to obedience. It summons us to love the good and avoid what is evil, to do this and not do that. The natural law is written in the human heart by God. 'To obey it is the very dignity of the human person; according to it the human person will be judged.'²⁰ (n.16) At the same time, the council insists throughout its teachings that faith, grace,

17. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a.2. (Quoted in Cahill, 215)

18. Cahill, 215.

19. Cahill, 215.

20. Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* no.16. In Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

and the Gospel must also decisively affect and shape our daily lives, and not only what comes from the realm of the natural and from human reason.

Discussion since Vatican II on natural law has centered on the philosophical approach. A number of significant teachings of the Catholic magisterium, however, have continued to employ the philosophical approach of the pre-conciliar manuals of moral theology. Catholic revisionists have criticized three aspects of the pre-conciliar manual approach.²¹ First, they argue that a more historically conscious method is needed in order to give greater attention to historical change and development, and in order to move away from an uncritical concept of an immutable human nature. A historically conscious approach to natural law is less deductive in its moral reasoning and more tentative in its specific judgements about complex issues. Second, revisionists criticize the present teaching of *physicalism*, in which the human moral act is identified with the physical structure of the act. Thus, the physical act of sexual intercourse can never be interfered with either to avoid procreation (artificial contraception) or to promote procreation (artificial insemination). Thirdly, the revisionist argue, the accepted natural law theory gives too much emphasis to faculties, powers, and natures and not enough to persons.²²

Feminists who speak of 'full humanity' as an ethical norm or test share the confidence of the natural law tradition in several areas: in seeing ethics as an objective enterprise; in building an understanding of basic and shared human characteristics through reflection on human life itself;

21. Some of the U.S. Theologians who would be considered revisionists are Richard McCormick, S.J., Charles Curran, and Margaret Farley.

22. McBrien, 959.

and in viewing the fulfillment of human characteristics as imbued with moral value.²³ While the concerns of many Roman Catholic feminists coincide with the natural law approach, they also introduce some new emphases. What ethicists overlooked was the fact that this process of derivation, as well as the formulation of the starting principles, always takes place within a historical setting in which the perspectives of some will be privileged over those of others and in which the perceived need to address social and moral problems can result in distortions of ostensibly universal values.²⁴ The patriarchal model of virtue that dominated neoscholastic ethics emphasized rationality, control, and certitude over affectivity, relationality, and dialogue. It also focused on the individual to the detriment of interdependence and community. For Christian feminists, virtue consists not only in the integrity and rectitude of the rational self; it also requires a relational concern for building communities in which all can contribute to mutual fulfillment, communities secured on a base of justice and ascending toward the completion and transformation of love.²⁵ The feminist moral ideal is to transform persons and societies toward more mutual and cooperative relationships between women and men, reflecting their equality as human persons. Rosemary Ruether writes, "The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive."²⁶ Feminist's ethics will need to constantly re-examine the status quo in light of the concrete requirements of the common

23. Cahill, 215.

24. Cahill, 215.

25. Cahill, 216.

26. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) 18.

good and, in particular, will enter into dialogue with diverse interpretations of the fundamental human goods.²⁷

Catholic ethics incorporates the social context on at least two levels. First, it acknowledges that moral thinking always occurs within a sociohistorical context. The language of the natural law theory inclines to the static. Nature has been understood in the West as that which is given, complete and fixed in itself.²⁸ Bernard Lonergan wrote,

Any deepening or enriching of our apprehension of man possesses religious significance and relevance. But the new conceptual apparatus does make available such a deepening and enriching. Without denying human nature, it adds the quite distinctive categories of man as a historical being. Without repudiating the analysis of man into body and soul, it adds the richer and more concrete apprehension of man as incarnate subject.²⁹

If the essential form of humans, animals, or the ecosystem as a whole has significantly changed since creation, then humans can no longer work from absolute abstract principles, but must begin with concrete particularity, which includes the historically new.³⁰ Second, Catholic ethics now recognizes that there is no such thing as purely individual or even interpersonal morality. Social structures and expectations impinge on all persons and all their ethical decisions, whether in the areas of economics or sex, just war or the termination of medical treatment. If we understand the nature of the human person as both integrated and embedded in

27. Cahill, 218.

28. Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994) 70.

29. Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in Its New Context," *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974) 60.

30. Gudorf, 71.

a radically historical social situation, then natural law morality will also be historicized, and can no longer take the form of a code, or any longer direct humans to specific acts which are then understood as willed by God.³¹ "Instead," Gudorf writes, "discernment will be oriented toward the complex and difficult task of understanding human nature in the present moment and situation, and also oriented to 1) assessing the direction of change, 2) deciding if that direction is in accord with the central and enduring insights of Christian revelation, and 3) affirming or opposing the direction of change based on the assessment."³² Gudorf separates discernment in two processes instead of one. She suggests, "Instead of discerning from the structures of the existing reality the will of God, we must first discern from human history up to and including existing reality the social, economic, political, biological, and environmental structures and trends in order to understand the processes at work in our world."³³ For this second step, Gudorf turns to the discernment of value. Gudorf continues,

We examine our past history, our own experience, the experience of our own community and that of other communities in order to discern what is most valuable, what satisfies the basic needs and aspirations of all persons, what best respects our deepest understanding of the evolutionary potential embedded in creation. At a basic level, we must decide how we can act within the existing reality in ways that foster life--fullness of life for humans and the ecosystem now and in the future. In such an approach neither nature as originally created nor nature as currently examined is normative. What is discerned is not so much nature only, but nature in history, and what is learned from discernment is not so much which specific acts to do or avoid, but what of the common good is endangered and should be supported by individuals as well as

31. Gudorf, 72.

32. Gudorf, 72.

33. Gudorf, 73.

the society.³⁴

In Catholic feminist writing, this emphasis on the communal and social dovetails with the Thomistic tradition of posing social issues in terms of the common good rather than in terms of individual rights. Thomas Aquinas gives the example of property, in which the primary level of natural law reveals that God did not distribute property, but made creation to meet the needs of all humans. The secondary and derivative sociocultural level reveals that an efficient system of meeting social needs is distribution of property to individuals; the third and most differentiated level of natural law on property is that reflected in positive law, which regulates the distribution and transfer of property within a specific society's private property system. The argument is that while the primary level is absolute and unchangeable, the secondary level is open to modification over time but is relatively stable, but the third level of positive law regulation is frequently changed for the purpose of allowing more just distribution of property.³⁵

The Scriptures provide resources for the church's moral discourse and its systematic reflection on Christian ethics, and they also form and guide the Christian community as a people 'who derive their identity from a book.'³⁶ The moral authority of the Bible is grounded in a community that is capable of sustaining Scriptural authority in faithful remembrance, liturgical celebration, ecclesial governance and continual reinterpretation of its own Biblical roots and

34. Gudorf, 73-74.

35. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae, 66:2; 1a2ae 94:6; 1a, 98:1. (Quoted in Gudorf, 72).

36. Stanley Hauerwas, "The Moral Authority of Scripture. The Politics and Ethics of Remembering," *Interpretation* 34 1980: 367.

tradition.³⁷ The specifically theological horizon of Roman Catholic ethics has also been renewed by Vatican II's mandate to recover the biblical inspiration of the moral life. It introduced some genuinely new emphases that had a profound effect on the life of Catholics. Sandra Schneiders outlines three effects.³⁸ First, it laid to rest the two-source theory of divine revelation, which most Catholics since the Council of Trent regarded as doctrine. *Dei Verbum* recognized that there is only one source of divine revelation, Jesus Christ who is 'the mediator and the sum total of Revelation' (*DV* 1.2) Second, in attempting to explain the interaction between Scripture and tradition, the Council made it clear that the 'Magisterium is not superior to the word of God, but is its servant.' (*DV* 2.10) Third, Scripture was recognized as a rich resource for the spiritual life of Catholics. In the Scriptures, God comes to meet and commune with us. Therefore, 'all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture.' (*DV* 6.21)

Biblical texts have to be read in their communal social, religious contexts and to be understood as faith-responses to particular historical situations. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes,

No systematization of Biblical moral injunctions, therefore, seems possible. It is misleading to speak about a uniform Biblical or New Testament ethics since the Bible is not a book but a 'bookshelf,' a collection of various literary texts that span almost a millennium of ancient history and culture. True, some similarities in themes or affinities in religious perspectives can be

37. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Discipleship and Patriarchy," *Feminist Ethic and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, ed. Charles E. Curran, Margaret A. Farley and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996) 34.

38. Sandra Schneiders, "The Bible and Feminism," *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) 32-33.

established. But such a systematization of themes and such a unification of perspective depends on the selective activity of the Biblical interpreter, the systematic construction of the ethicist, or the one-sided selection of the church rather than on the unilateral and clear-cut authority of Scripture itself.³⁹

The Bible and its subsequent interpretations are not only sources for liberation but also resources for oppression. The appeal to Scripture has authorized, for example, persecution of Jews, burning of witches, torture of heretics, national wars of Europe, the subhuman conditions of American slavery, and the anti-social politics of the Moral Majority. Johann Baptist Metz writes,

The political appeal to the moral authority of the Bible can be dangerous if it is sustained by the 'community of the forgiven' but not by the *ecclesia semper reformanda*. It can be dangerous, especially if the Christian community is shaped by the remembrance of 'the historical winners' while abandoning the subversive memory of innocent suffering and of solidarity with the victims of history.⁴⁰

Elizabeth Cady Stanton summed up the negative use of the Bible as a weapon against women's demand for political and ecclesial equality:

From the inauguration of the movement for woman's emancipation the Bible has been used to hold her in the 'divinely ordained sphere' prescribed in the Old Testament and New Testament. The canon and civil law, church and state, priests and legislators, all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, an inferior being, subject to man. Creeds, codes, Scriptures and statutes are all based on this idea.⁴¹

39. Schüssler-Fiorenza, 34.

40. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad Books, 1980) 88-118, 185-199.

41. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible: The Women's Bible*, intro. by Barbara Welter, repr. of 1895 ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1974) 7.

In recent years, there has been an explosion of biblical research reconstructing early Christian history to include women's history in order to reclaim history as the history of men and women. Against traditional consensus, a position has gradually formed which today attributes to the women of the first generation in the Church a far wider competence than was credited before. In fact, some of the passages that fit without difficulty into both the social-patriarchal, as well as the ecclesial-hierarchical viewpoint, now reflect an underlying positive theology of women and had a formative historical impact. Some have not. For example, Col. 3:18-4:1 and Eph. 5:22-6:9, the *Haustafel* or household codes have been reconstructed by different scripture scholars. The household codes consist of three pairs of relationships: wife-husband, slave-master, and father-children. Each pair receives reciprocal admonitions. Using an 'evaluative hermeneutics' of biblical tradition, Schüssler-Fiorenza writes:

The central interest of these injunctions lies in the enforcement of the submission and obedience of the socially weaker group--wives, slaves and children--on the one hand, and in the authority of the head of the household, the *paterfamilias*, on the other hand.... While this pattern of submissiveness functions differently in early Christian documents and their social-ecclesial historical contexts, the 'household dimension' does seem nevertheless characteristic for this trajectory. It conceives not only of family but also church and state in terms of the patriarchal household.⁴²

Schüssler-Fiorenza's feminist critical hermeneutics of the *Haustafel* text has the aim to become a 'dangerous memory' that reclaims the foremothers' and foresisters' sufferings and struggles in and through the subversive power of the critically remembered past.⁴³

42. Schüssler-Fiorenza, 39.

43. Schüssler-Fiorenza, 53.

That same scripture may appear schizophrenic when read against Romans 8: 38-39, 'neither death, nor life,...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God.' or Galatians 3: 27-28, 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus', or 'you have put on the new man...where cannot be Greek or Jew, uncircumcised or circumcised...., but Christ is all in all' (Col 3:10). Francis Moloney, SBD writes of these two passages,

There can be no doubt, in the light of these observations, that the argument treated in these two texts is absolutely central to Pauline thought, and it will not allow any alteration or adaptation with the change of time and circumstances. In the passage from Galatians, Paul describes this new situation as a place where all constitute 'one man', while in Colossians he goes even further with his spatial idea, and explicitly states that 'the new man' is a place *where* (Greek: *hopou*) the divisions so commonly accepted can no longer exist. Paul's central understanding of 'life in Christ' is nothing less than an insistence that our very existence as Christians is not something we personally possess; it is a radically new situation of life and love in to which we enter through baptism in the Church. To be a Christian, therefore, means to participate in the lives of others, to share, to break down the barriers that divide us. It would have been impossible for Paul to imagine an *autonomous* Christian.⁴⁴

For Paul, autonomy and Christian would have been terms that contradicted each other. We exist and have our lives as Christians only in the profound openness to the sharing of life and love with other Christians. As Paul told the Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

44. Francis J. Moloney, SBD, *Woman First Among the Faithful* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1986) 36-37.

Robert Gula lays the foundation for looking at all moral theology by looking at Jesus' teaching and life. He writes:

The most unambiguous demand Jesus makes of his disciples is to respond wholeheartedly to his commandment of love (Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12: 28-34, Luke 10: 25-28). In laying down the double commandment of love, Jesus linked and put into mutual relation the love of God and the love of neighbor. The love of God finds expression in the love of neighbor, and the love of neighbor receives its foundation and energy in the love of God.⁴⁵

Jesus summoned his hearers to a new way of life in the kingdom of God, even if the result for those who follow him is rejection or persecution. Jesus established a radically inclusive community in which the sinner, the poor, the outcast, and the marginal have a new place and are even preferred in God's eyes. The extent to which Jesus forms us and gives meaning to our life is far beyond anything in Jewish law.

This early Christian ethic of love, mutuality and shared life in community could provide a model for the family, the church for the world. It could provide a model for the restructuring of the patriarchal household of God into a kinship community. A feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation seeks to reactivate this early Christian ethic for today so that it can become a transformative historical model for the ordering of interpersonal communities, society, and the churches.

45. Richard Gula, S.S., *What Are They Saying about Moral Norms?* (Ramsey, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1981) 7.

REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF THE FAMILY

The family is the first form of community that an individual experiences. Much of the traditional teaching about the family would define the Christian family as a constellation of related persons whose core is one or more heterosexual married couples, and there exists a nest of satellite assumptions and values and norms that have to do with roles and relationships appropriate to various persons within that constellation.⁴⁶ In the minds of many is the idea that intact families with two married parents are much better than other forms. But it is an error to assume that simply because the external facade looks 'correct,' that the interior is healthy. Insisting that destructive marriages stay intact, that damaging parent-child relationships are better than severed ties, we have made the family an idol. And this idol has many victims: husbands who feel imprisoned by breadwinner roles in jobs they abhor or feel deprived of close relationships with their children because of stereotypical male sex roles; wives who feel stifled by their world of housework and child care, or overwhelmed by the double burden of home and job; children bound to abusive or insensitive parents.⁴⁷

Feminist theologians would defy one model and one normative shape for families; especially when it becomes an institutional fortress of patriarchy, sexism and heterosexism. "With a feminist understanding of agape as mutual, passionate, deeply interested, and unconditional," Sally Purvis writes, "the 'problem of the family' shifts. The challenge is not the

46. Sally B. Purvis, "A Common Love: Christian Feminist Ethics and the Family," *Religion, Feminism, & the Family*, ed. Anne Carr, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 111.

47. Christine E. Gudorf, "Sexuality and the Family, Part 2: The Role of the Church," *Second Opinion* 11 (July) 31.

renunciation of affect and intensity but rather the development of wider and wider circles of intense, passionate love. The traditional family, then, is rendered problematic because of its 'special relations' but only insofar as the family is defined as a unity of separation or division over against other relationships."⁴⁸

In this age of television and saturated advertising, images of the traditional family are perpetually before us, inciting envy, and at times a withering sense of shame. Statistics and good sense, however, tell us that the family is now defined in many ways. We realize there aren't many maps for this new territory. Some of the issues facing family life that are influencing the paradigm shift in our self-understanding of family are: divorce, single parents, second and third marriages, two-career couples, geographical dispersion, gay and lesbian couples, 'skip generation' parenting and 'biological clock' parenting. With the nuclear family model embedded in our recent history, our vision needs to be challenged to include the moral and social importance of the bonds between parents and children, of the fact that even persons without spouses or children are members of families, and that the responsibilities of adults to their own elders are important along with their responsibilities to their children.

In search of a renewed Christian vision of family, this thesis will reflect attitudes of the scriptures, the patristic period, the reformation and recent Church teachings. Over and over, the literature indicates that there has always been a need for a prophetic voice for radical reformation of structures and attitudes toward family life. In the scriptures we find a picture

48. Purvis, "A Common Love: Christian Feminist Ethics and the Family," 115.

somewhat different than the nuclear family. John Rogerson in his article, "The Family and Structures of Grace in the Old Testament," writes:

The family in ancient Israel was a natural social mechanism that developed initially to meet particular circumstances. It was often polygamous, especially in its leading families and in the pre-exilic period. It was far more advantageous to men than to women. Although it tried to generate mechanisms such as blood revenge, and the responsibility of the *mishpachah* to support the smaller family units if their members fell on hard times, it was often powerless in practice to prevent the incursion of the state and of powerful landowners or merchants into its sphere of interest, with the results that families became debt-ridden and lost their land and freedom.⁴⁹

The early church believed it was close to, and hence living in anticipation of, a new age which would exclude marrying and giving in marriage. Family ties and responsibilities were in favor of an imminent kingdom of God in which unity with God and God's people would transcend special relationships begun before its dawning. Carolyn Osiek in her article, "The New Testament and the Family," writes:

Our first-century people would think of 'family' rather as the entire network of people related to each other by blood, marriage and other intimate social ties, such as clientage. A second meaning would be the family in its vertical extension, its ancestry. A third, narrower meaning would be all who live under the same roof as an extended household: nuclear family, other relatives, slaves, renters, etc. While the nuclear family certainly existed, neither the Hebrew word *bayit*, nor the Greek *oikos* or *oikia*, nor the Latin *domus* or *familia* bear that meaning.⁵⁰

The family system was patriarchal. The legal authority of male elders extended over everyone in their household and in their extended family, including adult children, as well as over the

49. John Rogerson, "The Family and Structures of Grace in the Old Testament," *The Family: In Theological Perspective*, ed. Stephen Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 41-42.

50. Carolyn Osiek, "The New Testament and the Family," in *The Family*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill & Dietmar Mieth, *Concilium* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 1995/4) 1-2.

property of all these persons. In practice, however, adult males, even women and slaves to a certain extent, controlled their own property. Women owned and inherited property in their own right, but technically required the permission of a male guardian to administer it--the Roman law of *tutela*.⁵¹ The moral authority of mothers, though not embedded in civil law, was just as binding. The modern assumption that the fourth commandment to honor one's parents (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) and the admonitions to children to obey parents in the New Testament household codes (Eph. 6:1-3, Col. 3:20) are addressed to minors is an adaptation to our own situation. In their original context, they were in fact addressed to adults. This means that, under Roman law, adult males could be household heads in their own right, yet owe obedience to a surviving father who legally-though usually not practically-controlled the son's property. Given much lower life expectancy than in a modern society, however, and the custom of males to marry wives as much as ten years younger than they, most adults no longer had a surviving father, though they were more likely to have a surviving mother. Wealthy Jewish, Christian and Greco-Roman widows are known to have been some of the most generous benefactors, while poor widows were some of the most vulnerable members of society. Adult children had a solemn responsibility to provide for needy widowed mothers, who otherwise had to depend on charitable aid and protection (1 Tim. 5:3-16; James 1:27).

The lives of children in the New Testament world was precarious. Infant and childhood mortality were high, and the poor sanitation, nutrition, and health practices of the urban

51. Osiek, 2.

populace meant that many were malnourished and deprived. Methods of contraception and abortion were dangerous, arbitrary, but nonetheless practiced. The most usual method of family limitation, however, was the abandonment of unwanted babies, especially daughters, who were a liability to poor families not in a position to gain in wealth and influence through their marriage.⁵²

Divorce was commonly practiced in both Jewish and Greco-Roman families, and divorce law, especially with regard to the consequent financial settlement, was well developed in both systems. Contrary to modern assumptions, the minor children of divorced parents were considered as belonging to their fathers, and so were much more likely to continue living with him than with their mothers. Jesus' well-documented resistance to divorce is surprising over against its context, either Palestinian or the later Greco-Roman environment in which these sayings were preserved (Mt 5: 31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 19: 2-10; Luke 16:18; I Cor. 7:10).⁵³

From the fourth century on the negative attitude of Christianity toward the family was expressed most clearly in the monastic movement. For example, John Chrysostom taught that, while the spiritual life of married persons was in principle inferior to that of the monks, it could nevertheless become superior because it was achieved in a context marked by greater obstacles and difficulties.⁵⁴ Consequently the church sustained the view of marriage and family as subordinate to other forms of Christian living and other spheres of Christian works. In the fourteenth century there was a significant shift in the focus from otherworldliness to social

52. Osiek, 3-4.

53. Osiek, 4-5.

54. Margaret Farley, "The Church and the Family: An Ethical Task" *Horizons* 10/1 1983: 54.

responsibility, from renunciation and withdrawal to self-discipline and achievement in a world where family and productive labor were combined.

The Protestant Reformation articulated a new understanding of the place of the family in Christian life. According to Martin Luther, there was no higher social calling than marriage. And raising children was the 'noblest and most precious work of them all.'⁵⁵ However, the theology of the Reformation was unable to withstand the cultural shift of the nineteenth century which brought the separation between the private world of the family and the public world of productive work. With that separation came the relegation of the family to a realm for women and children. In the Roman Catholic tradition, marriage was elevated to the dignity of a sacrament in the twelfth century, although it was still seen subordinate to virginity as the way of living one's sexual life.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* and Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* (.52) holds out the following ideal of marriage:

The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a 'domestic church'. It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the church, as is evident in the New Testament...The family is a privileged community called to achieve a 'sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing.'⁵⁶

The purpose of this community, however, is not to enclose its members of Christian values for

55. William Lazareth, *Luther on the Christian Home*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960) 133.

56. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2204 and #2206

safety in a hostile world. The family should serve, in the words of *Gaudium et spes* (.52) as a school of deeper humanity. This happens where there is care and love for the every day; when there is a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows.⁵⁷ The Christian family's 'true vocation' is 'the transformation of the earth and renewal of the world, of creation and of all humanity.'⁵⁸ The interior solidarity of the family flows outward in a 'civilization of love' for humanity and the common good, in country, state and world.⁵⁹ Civilizing love, gift of self, and the social role of the family are directly linked to Jesus' commands to provide food, drink, clothing, and welcome to the needy (Mt. 25: 34-36); and to his warning of judgement on those who turn the need away (Mt. 25: 41-43).

The diversity of family models is evident in today's culture. Many families are divorcing, blending or re-writing the script altogether. In this process, children may become marginalized. The physical, psychological, moral and spiritual health of children is intimately linked to the health of the family. With regard to family form, Ted Peters, in his book, *For the Love of Children*, argues that two parents in a mutually supporting relationship provide children with the best opportunity for healthy growth.⁶⁰ He does this without negating the social support that he believes single parent households, childless heterosexual couples or homosexual couples deserve. Peters concludes that what is important is the quality of family life, not the diversity of forms. Underlying all of this discussion is Peters concern for the well-being of

57. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 59.

58. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 18.

59. *Gaudium et Spes* no.15.

60. Ted Peters, *For the Love of Children: Genetic Technology and the Future of the Family* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 11-12.

children. "Even if our era watches as the nuclear family goes by the board, the institution of the family in some form is absolutely necessary if our society is to show love to its children."⁶¹

Stanley Hauerwas suggests that the marital bond seeks a higher purpose than mere self-fulfillment through intimacy. The higher purpose is the raising of children. Hauerwas suggests that our moral task ought not to be to choose the right person but to learn how to love and care for this stranger to whom we find ourselves married.⁶²

One area of family life which deserves special mention concerns sexuality. Historically, the Catholic tradition has honored those who choose sexual continence as a way of discipleship. From antiquity we have honored those who embrace the path of virginity either individually or in the social context of the monastic or religious life. For well over a millennium the western priesthood has been a celibate one. The strong value that the church places on sexual continence has had, at times, the negative effect of undervaluing the positive and sacramental worth of sexual love, especially when continence was praised partially as a result of suspicions about bodiliness and pleasure. Catholic thinking about sexuality is on a trajectory toward appreciation of the interpersonal dimension as primary, with procreation in a secondary place.⁶³

Sexuality, of course, means more than genital acts; sexuality encompasses holistically the bodily in relationship to another. The great task of contemporary spirituality is to achieve a positive asceticism of sexuality in a culture which overvalues the erotic and the sexual. In that

61. Peters, 10.

62. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 161.

63. Lawrence S. Cunningham & Keith J. Egan, *Christian Spirituality: Themes from the Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 119.

sense, it implies a whole range of experiences appropriate to one's condition and one's sense of self. It is for that reason that Elizabeth Dreyer can write:

There is something amiss if one's sexuality is not a primary locus of the revelation of God. As relational, sexuality is replete with potential elements for the spiritual life--self-knowledge: self-gift; love; kindness; intimacy; touch; kiss; embrace; nakedness; trust; vulnerability; pleasure; union; ecstasy; self-transcendence; play; self-denial; creativity; companionship; forgiveness...⁶⁴

History shows a development in our understanding of marriage, subtle that it may be, from procreation only to procreation and mutual love. The 1917 Code of Canon Law defined marriage as a contract in which spouses exchange the right over one another's bodies with a view to the acts apt for procreation.⁶⁵ The 1983 Code of Canon Law replaces the former with a language of covenant and contract.⁶⁶ Using the language of 'total self-gift,' *Familiaris Consortio* states, "The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving."⁶⁷ Cahill wrestles with this concept by writing,

The idea that each act is a total self-gift depends upon a very romanticized depiction of sex, and even of marital love. Certainly there will be times when an act of sexual sharing is hampered or disturbed by factors, intrinsically or extrinsically generated, which impinge, either temporarily or permanently, on the couple's relationship. They are stressed by economic difficulties, an ongoing disagreement about a family matter, blind spots in seeing one another's emotional needs, a crying child, lack of sleep, or an important project due at work. But even more than

64. Elizabeth A. Dreyer, *Earth Crammed with Heaven: A Spirituality of Everyday Life* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1994) 116.

65. John C. Ford, S.J., "Marriage: Its Meaning and Purposes," *Theological Studies* 3 1942: 348.

66. *1983 Code of Canon Law* nos. 1055-1057.

67. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* 1994 no. 11.

that, in the *most* ideal of circumstances, human beings rarely if ever accomplish 'total self-gift'.⁶⁸

She continues her thesis by writing, "When aligned with an 'authoritative' over emphasis on procreation, an unreal idealization of sex acts can demean married persons' positive experiences of sexuality by labeling any so-called 'compromise' of the ideal as dishonest, contradictory, false, and selfish."⁶⁹ In the relationship of sex, love and babies, Cahill re-visions a personalized and gender-equal paradigm. It would require giving up those purposes which fulfill sexual activity in the immediate experience of the partners, i.e., procreation and to reposition it in the social context. Cahill suggests,

The parenthood of the individual should be placed in the context of relationship to one's co-parent; conceiving, birthing, and parenting a child should be placed within the family, both nuclear and extended; and the family must be seen, neither as a "haven" from the world, nor as a nexus of social control, but as a school for critical contribution to the common good. To place parenthood in social context would also mean, from a Christian standpoint, to ask how Christian values transform the family, and shape the family's contribution to society.⁷⁰

This thesis has developed some of the issues that shape family life today by examining the scriptures for models of family life and researching the Roman Catholic tradition for an ethic of sexuality and family life. Herbert Anderson, a pastoral counselor and theologian writes, "A Christian vision for family living should not add to the powerlessness or guilt people feel already for having failed to achieve their ideal picture. It should rather empower families to

68. Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender & Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996)

69. Cahill, *Sex, Gender & Christian Ethics*, 205.

70. Cahill, *Sex, Gender & Christian Ethics* 207.

move toward a new future."⁷¹

The challenge of a family is to foster the identity and unique worth of each individual member while at the time preparing children for responsible citizenship in the world. Thus the family holds a two-fold task: individuation and socialization. The family must provide an environment safe enough for children to find their identity and interests of the child. This recognition of the child as separate and self-directed is for most parents a basic part of their own adult maturation."⁷² The family is responsible for raising up individuals capable of living together in order that another generation will be prepared for the ongoing care and nurture of humankind. The family is a school for virtue, a domestic church in which daily family living nurtures faithfulness and strengthens its members for service in the world. It is a believing and evangelizing community--a sign and a meeting place of the covenant between God and humankind. *The Apostolic Exhortation on the Family* of Pope John Paul II expresses the view that the family is an evangelizing agent of behalf of building up the reign of God: "The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity...In fact, as an educating community, the family must help people discern their vocation and accept greater responsibility in the search for greater justice, educating them from the beginning in interpersonal relationships, rich in justice and in love."⁷³

71. Herbert Anderson, *Regarding Children* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) 71.

72. Christine E. Gudorf, "Sacrificial and Parental Spiritualities," *Religion, Feminism & the Family*, ed. Anne Carr & Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996) 303.

73. *Familiaris Consortio* no. 75.

The family is a hospitable community. In many parts of the ancient world, showing hospitality to strangers was a law of the land. It was more than a courtesy to welcome the stranger at your gate; it was a sacred obligation and a matter of survival. The stranger is anyone who is not me. In the family context, the stranger could be child, spouse or neighbor. Anderson writes, "Providing space in which children grow and flourish is very much like showing hospitality to strangers. When children bring home friends who are different or ideas that are strange, the limits of family hospitality are tested."⁷⁴ In order to be hospitable, a family needs to be open to change. Families are likely to struggle with being a hospitable community if they regard diversity as antithetical to community.

Compassion is an essential component of a Christian vision for family living because it recognizes the interdependence of all living things. The family is a compassionate community because it cares for the most vulnerable ones in our midst--children, handicapped, and the elderly. A compassionate community learns how to suffer with one another. A family is a compassionate community when it responds with tenderness to the least fortunate or most vulnerable in its membership without blaming them, humiliating them, or diminishing their identity. A family is a compassionate community when all aspects of the human situation are dignified by kind and gentle care.

Justice preserves the integrity of the individual family members and the family unit. If a family is just, it will be a community in which there is mutual respect, in which expectations are explicit, in which no individual's needs and desires dominate, and in which authority is not

74. Anderson, 73.

arbitrary. As a just community, the rules about hitting or interrupting or lying are applied to adults and children equally. When governed by an ethic of justice, everyone in a family is entitled to the information necessary to make responsible decisions; otherwise secrecy erodes justice. A just family is a community of moral inquiry. Parents teach children values by the way they value children. They also teach values by how they decide to spend money or participate in recycling projects. In a time when choices are more and more ambiguous, it is difficult for family members to make moral decisions. The family becomes a community of moral inquiry when everyone old enough to participate is included in a decision that has ethical weight. Families are to act as moral agents. They are summoned to give back what does not belong to them, cancel debts, honor each gift, and redistribute power. Just families will regard other families with needs and desires equal to their own.⁷⁵

Families that seek an ethical vision will work toward redefining family roles in such a way that all the members have freedom to develop their gifts and pursue their dreams. Other roles are more dynamic or emotional and have to do with the parts people play to keep the family system functioning as a human community. Generally, these emotional roles are assigned in ways that are not easily identified. These emotional or dynamic family roles belong to the system as a whole. Therefore it is an act of restorative justice in a family if a role such as 'the responsible one' or 'the peacemaker' is taken from one individual and given back to the family as a whole.⁷⁶ A family that seeks justice will work for an equal and flexible distribution of

75. Anderson, 83.

76. Anderson, 85.

emotional roles in which everyone will have a turn at being naughty or righteous or klutzy or playful or even a little crazy. When a family locks people into particular emotional roles, it acts unjustly and may even sacrifice one of its members to keep things as they are.

The family is a reconciling community. Because it is so difficult to hide our sinfulness in the family, it is a community where forgiveness and reconciliation are both longed for and resisted. It is easy to forget the gospel vision of new beginnings in the daily routine of bills and dirty dishes and leaky faucets, cranky children and aging parents. Therefore, families should endeavor to find ways to imagine a peaceable kingdom in which the lion and the lamb can lie down together, where children do not bicker and parents do not fight.

A family today must be seen as the place where both men and women are called to labor and to struggle with the fundamental challenges of human love and the making of human history. It cannot be a place of subordinate importance for men or predominant for women. The patriarchal model of family, church and society are now so deeply entrenched in the Christian tradition that it is difficult to discover and remember the earliest movement among Christians to a model of coequal discipleship. In regard to role sharing with wives, Palkovitz writes,

we should note that as husbands, men are instructed to (sacrificially) love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25), and all are commanded to consider others as more important than themselves (Phil. 2: 3-4). Regardless of the variety of doctrinal positions on 'headship,' it does not require major leaps in logic to assume that any family 'leadership' (by males or females) would come under servant-leader guidelines with warnings against lording it over others.⁷⁷

Palkovitz argues that if persons committed to scripture are following the more central biblical

77. Rob Palkovitz, "The Recovery of Fatherhood?" *Religion, Feminism & the Family* ed. Anne Carr & Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) 321.

principles (seeking God with all their mind, soul and strength, seeking first the kingdom of God, doing unto others as they would have done unto themselves; then the details of masculinity/femininity and the working out of a parenting role would not need much alignment. Commitment to Christian principles based on biblical literacy would require less focus on gender and role dichotomies and greater emphasis on living out kingdom principles in a manner that affirms the values of others, be they wives, husbands, men, women or children.

The literature review of the Roman Catholic tradition raises some tensions about family life, family form and an ethical vision. Some may read this and feel they don't fit into the vision, either because of lifestyle or religious preference. How does one speak of the Sacrament of Marriage and make room for single parents or gay and lesbian relationships? A vision of family life should not be suffocated by restricting images. Family life and family structures are changing and structures of patriarchal families are being dismantled. We need to listen to the new music of these families, as men and women learn to be in right relationship, respecting each other and inviting each other into a mutual relationship and conversation where all voices may be heard. We may need to improvise on the written score for awhile as we discover the fullness of our inner music...and discover ways of being in harmony.

The language of 'ethics' or 'moral challenge' is often a turn off to people because in the minds of many it depicts rules and regulations. Many see morality as imposed from the outside. A great challenge of catechesis is to see the moral life as a joyful response to a personal and communal calling from God. We must nurture the joy of experiencing the moral life as a path freely chosen, in which God is our companion on the journey, who encourages, impels,

welcomes and forgives.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus redrafted the boundaries of family, neighbor and household: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.' (Mk. 3: 31-35) In this new household we live no longer as slaves or wives or children of the *pater familias*, the male head of the patriarchal household, but now are sons and daughters of God. (Gal. 4:6) At the foot of the cross, the boundaries of God's household are once again changed. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother.' (Jn. 20: 26-27) We are far from the full reordering of the household of persons, relationships and attachments; yet, it remains our eschatological hope. As we embrace this vision, we will be able to say *no* to structures that inflict violence and pain, hardened hearts, patriarchal family forms and *yes* to our God who reaches out and ask us to share the crazy dream of love.

The ministry of the family as the church of the home is rooted in its identity, mission, tasks, and responsibilities. As Pope John Paul II tells us: "Among the fundamental tasks of the Christian family is its ecclesial task: The family is placed at the service of building up the kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church."⁷⁸ The church of the home provides, prepares, nourishes, and sustains the members of both the Church and civil society. At the baptism of an infant or child, the church promises to support the parents in their role as primary nurturer's of faith. The Church plays a prophetic role in the formation of family life. Expectations of an ethic of family life needs to be consistent with an ethic of Christian

78. *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 49.

community.⁷⁹

79. For clarification, this thesis does not intend to overlay an image of family onto an image of church. Parker Palmer in his book, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of the Public Life* (New York: Crossroads, 1983 p. 120) writes: "When idealized image of family is imposed upon the church, our experience in the congregation becomes restricted...The church--where we might experience creative conflict, heterogeneity, and freedom for innovation--becomes dominated by the expectation of closeness and warmth. In such a community, people with whom we cannot achieve intimacy, or with whom we do not want to be intimate are squeezed out."

REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The church is a way of living in anticipation of the coming reign of God. The church makes a claim that civil governments do not: that it is the People of God, Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Catherine M. LaCugna writes:

The life of the church is to be animated by the life of God: the church is to embody in the world the presence of the risen Christ, showing by its preaching and by its own form of life that sin and death have been overcome by Jesus Christ. The church also claims to embody in its corporate life the presence, fruits, and work of the Holy Spirit, to be the visible sign of God's reign, of the divine-human communion, and communion of all creatures with one another.⁸⁰

This is obviously an eschatological hope, not a present reality. Our liturgical ancestors recognized that the way we live our lives is a litmus test of the authenticity of our worship, that we must worship the same God on Sunday and during the week; that the equality we know at the table of Christ's Body must be celebrated at all our other tables, and that daily more deeply we must come to embrace the demands of every spoken 'Amen.'⁸¹ The vocation of each member of the church of Jesus Christ, writes LaCugna, 'is to be stewards (*oikonomoi*) of God's economy, to serve others (*diakonia*), to preach the message of the reign of God (*kerygma*), to promote communion (*koinònia*).'⁸² Our liturgies must be an experience of justice. James Dallen points out some of the injustices in the liturgy:⁸³

80. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 401.

81. Kathleen Hughes, R.S.C.J. developed the liturgical movement in the United States prior to Vatican II in her book, *How Firm a Foundation: Voices of the Early Liturgical Movement* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1990).

82. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 401.

83. James Dallen, "Liturgy and Justice for All," *Worship* Vol 65, No. 4 1991: 303-304.

- A congregation, half or more of whom are women, professes its faith: 'For us *men* and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became *man*.'
- A small child about four years old, walks with his parents as they go to communion. He reaches out and says, 'I want some.' The eucharistic minister smiles, pats him on the head, and shifts him into the other line where the priest gives him a blessing.
- A Catholic university president is ordered by the archbishop to tell four hundred members of the Catholic gay group known as Dignity that they are no longer welcome to celebrate Sunday Mass as a group in the university chapel.
- The ministry of presiding at eucharist is restricted to men who claim to have the charism of celibacy; the restriction is not open to discussion.
- An elderly woman gives a stipend to have Mass offered for her deceased husband and does so under the impression that she receives some benefit in exchange for her money.
- Pastors or liturgy committees continue to use wafers rather than a large altar bread and refuse to allow the congregation to receive communion from the cup because both practices are 'too expensive' or 'impractical.' Or people bypass the cup for fear of AIDS.

These vignettes do not point to the reality of church as sacrament or as an icon of the Trinity.

This reality can only be made present, inasmuch as the members of the church exist together

'perichoretically', in mutual giving and receiving, without separateness, or subordination, or

division. And inasmuch as the church has saving significance, it is an icon of God's saving and

healing love.⁸⁴ "The eucharist has been, and still is, in captivity," writes Dallen. "It is held

captive by the power structures and stereotypes of culture that have entered into our liturgy. If

Sunday worship does not convey an experience of justice and hospitality, then how can we

inspire work for justice and peace?"⁸⁵ LaCugna writes, "To the extent that the Eucharist is not a

84. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 402.

85. Dallen, 303-304.

sacrament of the inclusive household, it contradicts itself and is invalid."⁸⁶ Stanley Hauerwas in his book, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* writes,

These rites, baptism and Eucharist, are not just 'religious things' that Christians do. They are the essential rituals of our politics. Through them we learn who we are. Instead of being motives or causes for effective social work on the part of Christian people, these liturgies are our effective social work. For the church *is* rather than has a social ethic, these actions are our most important social witness. It is in baptism and Eucharist that we see most clearly the marks of God's kingdom in the world. They set our standard, as we try to bring every aspect of our lives under their sway.⁸⁷

Justice and mercy are the domain of ethics. Walking with God is liturgy, ritual, and sacraments.

Megan McKenna, in her book, *Rites of Justice* writes, "The ethic and liturgy of a people become the manifestation of the glory of God to the earth."⁸⁸

When you fail to be in solidarity with one another, Dallen writes, "your division prevents what you do from being the Lord's Supper... You fail in your mission to be the memorial of the Lord and the catalyst for all humanity to achieve God's goal."⁸⁹ In her article "Liturgy and Justice: An Intrinsic Relationship", Kathleen Hughes writes:

Justice cares for the establishment of right relationships. Justice implies the recognition within us and among us of our growth as unique human persons with gifts and grace, with potential and desires, with anxieties and hopes and fears. Justice includes unity and solidarity, the linking up of our destinies as brothers and sisters who rise and fall together without domination or constraint.

86. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 406.

87. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethic* (Notre Dame: Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) 107-108.

88. Megan McKenna, *Rites of Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997) 2.

89. Dallen, 291.

without exploitation or manipulation, without discrimination or violence.⁹⁰

Robert Hovda challenges the sacramental imagination by trying to catch our attention with a new perspective. He writes,

Good liturgical celebration, like a parable, takes us by the hair of our heads and puts us in a kingdom scene, where we are treated like we've never been treated before...because this is clearly and intentionally God's domain, God's reign...where we are bowed to and incensed and sprinkled and kissed and touched and fed with bread and a cup that are equally shared among all. It's a whole new scene. And it prompts some beautiful new feelings. And it calls for some beautiful new decisions.⁹¹

The church maintains the power to tell the Christian story Sunday after Sunday in the Lectionary and its preaching. The lectionary has a selective memory. Women's reality has been minimized in the lectionary. Readings throughout the liturgical year either ignore women or present a portion of their narrative out of context. The story told Sunday after Sunday often rehearses the victories that theology supports and embellishes, structures maintain and perpetuate, and canons guarantee.

Two of the most obvious exclusions of women from the lectionary are from the Pauline text found in different readings from the daily lectionary. In the continuous reading from Romans, verses one and two of chapter 16 are omitted from lectionary #490 (Saturday of the Thirty-first Week in Ordinary Time, Year I): 'I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deaconess of the church of Cenchrae. Please welcome her in the Lord, as saints should. If she

90. Kathleen Hughes, "Liturgy and Justice: An Intrinsic Relationship," *Living No Longer for Ourselves* ed. Kathleen Hughes and Mark R. Francis (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) 37.

91. Robert Hovda, "It Begins with the Assembly," *The Environment for Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1980) 38.

needs help in anything, give it to her, for she herself has been of help to many including myself.' Therefore, in our liturgy, the churchgoers will never hear of Phoebe, a woman who was a deacon. Another overt omission of a verse about women's spiritual influence is made in 2 Timothy 1: 1-12, which is assigned Wednesday of the 9th Week in Ordinary Time, Year II. Lectionary #355 neatly excises verses 4 and 5, including: 'I find myself thinking of your sincere faith--faith which first belonged to your grandmother Lois and to your mother Eunice.' The first reading for each of the Sundays of Easter is taken from the Acts of the Apostles. The selections focus on the sermons and activities of Peter, Paul, Barnabas and Stephen. The women leaders found in the Acts of the Apostles--Tabitha, Lydia and Priscilla--are given second place in the weekday readings of the Easter Season. The first reading on Pentecost Sunday (#64) is Acts 2: 1-11. The opening verse as given in the bible (NAB) reads: 'When the day of Pentecost came, it found them gathered in one place.' Those who were gathered are named in Acts 1 as the eleven and 'some women in their company, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.' In the lectionary, the opening sentence is interpreted and modified to read, 'When the day of Pentecost came it found the *brethren* gathered in one place.' Although 'brethren' theoretically may be an inclusive noun, it is not heard as such in this selection.⁹² A lectionary reading of Paul's text gives us little information about women in the early church.

Exclusion from the lectionary is only one way that the women's experience in the church is minimized. Other exclusive symbols that dominate our worship are a male God we call father, a hierarchical decision-making body which is presided over by a male priesthood, and a 'natural

92. Ruth Fox, O.S.B., "Women in the Bible and the Lectionary," *Call to Action Spirituality/Justice Reprint* June, 1996: 2-4.

resemblance to Christ' based on being male rather than being human and Christian. Carol Christ writes: "Religious symbol systems focused around exclusively male images of divinity create the impression that female power can never be fully legitimate or wholly beneficent. This message need never be explicitly stated...for its effect to be felt."⁹³ An exclusively male symbolism for God effectively functions to deny women the possibility of religious affirmation of their own power, their bodies and sexuality, their will, and their positive connections with other women in history and in the present.

Vatican II taught the idea that the pilgrim church on its way through history is continually in need of reform and increased fidelity to its own calling.⁹⁴ We may look at Christian feminism as a blessing, not only for women, and not only for women and men together, but for the church itself. Vatican II had a significant influence on the church's self-understanding. The church recognized in the document, *Gaudium et Spes* that where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves an equity with men before the law and in fact.⁹⁵ Another powerful conciliar text for the full inclusion of women in all aspects of the church's life is the statement that 'every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.'⁹⁶

Anne Carr in her book, *Transforming Grace*, writes that in the midst of the history of

93. Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess," *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 275.

94. Vatican II, "Decree on Ecumenism," nos. 5-6, In Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

95. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 9.

96. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 29.

sexism, feminism comes as an offer of 'transforming grace' to the church, an offer to repent and become a living community of justice and peace.⁹⁷ Feminist theology calls the church to apply its concern for liberation and empowerment for all people to its own internal structures.

Recognizing the connection between the church's mission and its structures, feminist theologies reiterate that to call for justice in the world the church must itself first be just.⁹⁸ If *all* are called by baptism to participate in the mission of the church and its ministry, as Vatican II clearly states,⁹⁹ then allocation of ministries must be governed by charism and competence rather than by any static classifications based on 'state in life.' Mary Hines writes: "Service within the church must, therefore, include the voices, experiences, gifts of all, since internal church structures exist to facilitate the liberating mission of the church for all people."¹⁰⁰ The church evolves through participating in the mission of God. To facilitate a journey toward wholeness, Letty Russell proposed another metaphor to convey her vision of the church. She used the metaphor of 'Church in the Round' to delineate:

...a community of faith and struggle working to anticipate God's New Creation by becoming partners with those who are at the margins of church and society. The metaphor (Church in the Round) speaks of people gathered around the table and in the world in order to connect faith and life in action/reflection (the round table), work for justice in solidarity with those at the margins of society (the kitchen table), and to welcome everyone as partners in God's world house (the

97. Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace* (Continuum: New York, 1996).

98. *Justice in the World*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1972) 44.

99. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* no. 33, In Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

100. Mary Hines, "Community For Liberation," *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* ed. Catherine M. LaCugna (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) 167.

welcome table).¹⁰¹

The metaphor uses three images to represent particular functions or tasks of the church: round table *connection*, kitchen table *solidarity*, and welcome table *partnership*. Through partnership or participation in creation, persons live in a new relationship with God, Christ, the world, and each other.

The letters of St. Paul to the community at Corinth provides a glimpse of his style of ministry in the early Christian community. It is summarized in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Each member of the community, through baptism into the one Spirit, has *charismata*--spiritual and ministerial gifts, intended for the building up of the Body of Christ. These *charismata* vary greatly, but they are fundamentally equal and non-hierarchical. They are not the same as natural qualities, though they build on these inherent human gifts. Paul challenges the *ekklesia* of Corinth to have mutual respect for one another's gifts, so that they can be freely and responsibly exercised. The greatest of all the *charismata* is love. Without charity as their root and foundation, the other gifts can easily be occasions for competition and divisiveness. There is a practical need to order the various gifts for the common good.

Miroslav Volf, in his book, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, conceives the structure of the church in a consistently trinitarian fashion. He writes,

Within a community of perfect love between persons who share all the divine attributes, a notion of hierarchy and subordination is inconceivable. Within *relations* between the divine persons, the Father is for that reason not the one over against the others, not 'the First,' but rather the one among the others. The structure of trinitarian relations is characterized neither by pyramidal

101. Letty Russell, *The Church in the Round: Feminist interpretation of the church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993) 12.

dominance of the one nor by a hierarchical bipolarity between the one and the many, but rather by a polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity of the many.¹⁰²

Volf suggests that in this model of the Trinity, the structure of ecclesial unity cannot be conceived by the way of the one human being, be it the Pope, the patriarch, or the bishop. Every ecclesial unity held together by a mon-archy, by a 'one-(man!)-rule,' is monistic and thus also un-trinitarian. Since no one human being can correspond to the trinitarian relational network, Volf concludes that ecclesiastical office is to be exercised collegially, even the office of the Pope.¹⁰³

Volf conceives not only the institutional office in a consistently trinitarian fashion but also the People of God. The symmetrical reciprocity of the relations of the trinitarian persons finds its correspondence in the image of the church in which *all* members serve one another with their specific gifts of the Spirit as an imitation of the Lord and through the power of the Father. Like the divine persons, they all stand in a relation of mutual giving and receiving.¹⁰⁴ Volf continues to construct ecclesial unity through the trinitarian lens. He sees ecclesial unity as inconceivable without the one, though this cannot be part of the ecclesial communion itself, since this would contradict the structure of trinitarian relations. He writes, "It is no accident that the New Testament attests no particular charisma of unity. Not until the letters of Ignatius does the preservation of unity become a specific task of the bishop. Here the 'council of bishops' corresponds to the 'unity of God.'¹⁰⁵ For Volf, the universal church portrays the sign of unity.

102. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 217.

103. Volf 217.

104. Volf 218-219.

105. Volf 218-219.

Within the universal church, a plurality of churches exist corresponding to the symmetrical relations within the Trinity. Volf writes: "This yields the ecclesial principle that the more a church is characterized by symmetrical and decentralized distribution of power and freely affirmed interaction, the more will it correspond to the trinitarian communion."¹⁰⁶ St. Paul, suggests Volf, places the 'one' into a linear series of multiple 'ones.' This model is in contrast to understanding of relationship between the one and the whole from a hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity in which the one is dominant.¹⁰⁷

A feminist ecclesiology, as all ecclesiology, is a theological discourse that seeks to express the present reality and to anticipate what ought to be the model. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza speaks of this in terms of the 'already' and the 'not-yet' of the *ekklesia* of women.¹⁰⁸ The *ekklesia* is not identified with separatist groups or with a church for women only. Rather, the *ekklesia* is that place of God's redemptive presence where women and men can be emancipated from sin and transformed into freedom. In this sense, the *ekklesia* is defined by the presence of the Spirit. Gustavo Gutiérrez in *Theology of Liberation* argues that the church is the sacrament of God; that is, the church is identified wherever it is that God is manifest in history.¹⁰⁹

The church worships so that all of life may become worship. Thus worship is not a retreat from the world but 'an exercise in vision, a practice in seeing,' which enables Christians to

106. Volf 236.

107. Volf 247.

108. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroads, 1993) 128.

109. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Cardidad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973) 260.

see the world as it really is--the creation of a loving and forgiving God.¹¹⁰ Affirming God as the source of all abundance, the world is not perceived as an autonomous entity but as God's sacramental creation, 'the sign and means of God's presence and wisdom, love and revelation'¹¹¹ All creation is a gracious and generous gift that enables communion with God, and all humanity is called to bless God--to participate in and celebrate God's manifold blessings through praise and thanksgiving. Alexander Schmemmann wrote:

We know that we were created as celebrants of the *sacrament* of life, of its transformation into life in God, communion with God. We know that real life is 'Eucharist,' a movement of love and adoration toward God, the movement in which alone the meaning and the value of all that exists can be revealed and fulfilled.¹¹²

Feminist ecclesiology does not merely focus on the importance of 'church'; rather it brings to the forefront the revisioning of the practice of ekklesia and the development of new discourses of ecclesiology. Many feminist are engaged in resistance to and transformation of what has been practiced and studied as church. This is an activity of justice that requires imagination and dialogue with others in a horizontal, rather than hierarchical patterns of interaction.

110. Robert E. Webber and Rodney Clapp, *People of the Truth: The Power of the Worshipping Community in the Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 94.

111. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973) 14.

112. Schmemmann 34-35.

REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

As we move toward a new millennium, the pain and the promise of this century is still poignantly with us. We carry its anguish and its hopes and its unfinished dreams. We are haunted by its memories and possibilities: the wrenching tragedy of two world wars; the lingering scars of Vietnam on our national psyche; the space program and the technological explosion; the transformation of our global communications system; the grassroots movements to overcome political oppression among the poor and dispossessed; international terror and violence.

As we look to the future, the human community is confronted with issues that are crucial to its future growth and survival. At the present rate the world population is doubling approximately every 20 years; our natural resources are dwindling; every day thousands die from malnourishment, disease or violence. We live under the threat of nuclear destruction and the widespread pollution of our environment. There is a growing threat of famine, starvation and poverty in large areas of our planet. We live with a system of international law and diplomacy that reflects a predominantly male approach to political and social realities; there is an ever increasing accumulation of destructive weapons that places human survival at risk and a weary earth that staggers under the unbalanced weight of glass skyscrapers in one direction and cardboard hovels in the other. We have become a wearier people ravaged by one nation's conquests and oppressed by another's achievement.

For many, a daily way of life is simple busyness. Julie Schor in her book, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* writes:

A market culture rooted in an ideology of individualism creates a demanding workplace

where some work ever harder to purchase things they do not need, while others, working equally hard, cannot secure the basics of food, shelter, and health care. Across both genders and all working groups, we are working more hours in an economy that has a preference for long-hour and multiple part-time jobs above a fraying safety net. Busyness enables many to consume more goods and services and a few to amass material wealth, but 'a poverty of time is stressing our social fabric.' Health, family nurture, community engagement, and true leisure all suffer.¹¹³

In 1963, when Pope John XXIII wrote *Pacem in Terris*, he pointed to three important 'signs of the times' that he wished to address in his letter: 1) the emancipation of the worker; 2) the emergence of the developing nations; and 3) the increasing participation of women in public life. *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, written at the Second Vatican Council declared that 'with respect to the fundamental rights of the human person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.'¹¹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* marked a major shift in the self-understanding of the Roman Catholic community in its relationship to the modern world. It takes a positive view of advances in human sciences, locates itself within the whole human community, and specifically puts itself in service to that community.

T. Howland Sanks writes:

It ends the ghetto mentality and urges dialogue with the world, with all its diverse voices. It no longer conceives of itself as a 'perfect society' but recognizes its failures and limitations as well as its need to learn from developments in the human sciences. It recognizes that it does not have all

113. Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

114. *Gaudium et Spes* no. 29.

the answers but must search for solutions to contemporary problems along with the rest of humanity. It recognizes and accepts change and a dynamic and evolutionary view of the world and the social order. Its mission is to witness to the Gospel and to serve the common good of all humankind, the second following from the first and not in conflict with it.¹¹⁵

While the modern secular perspective often presupposes and reinforces an individualistic and subjectivistic understanding of God,¹¹⁶ a truly trinitarian doctrine of God can provide the framework of a social theory--a theological understanding of community--that reunites the individual with the group. When God is perceived as a dynamic community of relation and freedom united in a reciprocal communion of life and work, then trinitarian theology becomes a relational theology that explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood, and communal life. A model of community is offered that affirms the profound uniqueness of each person as distinct yet inseparable from others; their personal existence consists in their relationship with one another.

In their book, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*, researchers, theologians and sociologists, Laurent Parks Daloz, Cheryl Keen, James Keen and Sharon Daloz Parks describe the 'new commons'. The authors perceive 'the commons' as a place where the diverse parts of a community could come together and hold a conversation within a shared sense of participation and responsibility. They recall earlier times of 'the commons,' the classic being the New England green ringed by the town hall, grange, courthouse, general store,

115. T. Howland Sanks, *Salt, Leaven & Light: The Community Called Church* (New York: Crossroads, 1992) 133.

116. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipgon detailed the costs to civil society of "radical individualism" in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984 and 1996).

post office, church and a flock of households. The book is a result of a study in which they conducted interviews over a period of several years with more than one hundred people who had sustained long-term commitments to work on behalf of the common good, even in the face of global complexity, diversity and ambiguity. In their interviews, they sought to answer four primary questions: 'What are such people like?' 'How do they become that way?' 'What keeps them going in spite of inevitable discouragement?' and 'What can be done to encourage this kind of citizenship to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century?'¹¹⁷

In choosing the people for their study, they were motivated by the question, 'How can we be part of creating a more inclusive common good?' Their criteria for selecting people to interview were: commitment to the common good, perseverance and resilience, ethical congruence between life and work and an engagement with diversity and complexity. Daloz, et al., believe that the emerging demands of twenty-first century citizenship call for an ability to not only care for a particular individual, community, or cause, but also to be able to see the larger implications of one's actions, and to recognize how one's work affects and is affected by the interdependent realities of the new commons.¹¹⁸

In the interdependent reality of the new commons, hardened social and organizational boundaries that prohibit constructive talk across tribal lines are artificial and dangerous constructs. In their tribal forms, the traditional conservative and liberal formulations have both

117. Laurent Parks Daloz, Cheryl Keen, James Keen, Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 5.

118. Daloz, et al., 6.

become inadequate. Daloz, et al., write:

The conservative position asserts a narrow view in which a set of deeply held values is imposed upon all in hope of creating a unified community. Inevitably the full participation of significant elements of the community is precluded. On the other hand, in its effort to include all, the liberal point of view is caught in a practice of relativism in which a minimalist conception of the common good undermines the formation of a shared moral compass, discouraging committed action by failing to acknowledge sufficiently both personal responsibility and the importance of conviction. Conservatives appear to take the "moral high road" by emphasizing personal conduct, but ignore the interdependence of the new commons. Liberals recognize systemic diversity, complexity and ambiguity, but tend to lack the gumption to seek new and more adequate moral ground in the midst of legitimate cultural diversity. If we are to engage the challenges of the twenty-first century, neither stance is adequate. We must kindle a common fire and forge a new synthesis of practical wisdom.¹¹⁹

In the research of Parks, et al., they concluded that no single event or influence ensured a committed life. However, it appeared that certain experiences increased the likelihood of forming the citizens for 'the commons' in the twenty-first century. They noted two master patterns: trustworthy and transformational relationships with *threshold people*, and *hospitable spaces* within which those relationships may develop and new forms of agency be practiced. Examples of threshold people include loving parents who care for the wider world, welcoming and diverse neighbors, teachers and other children, mentors who challenge, support and inspire young adults and professional colleagues and other kindred spirits who provide good company and invigorate vision.¹²⁰ Hospitable and safe spaces include the following:

119. Daloz, et al., 13.

120. Daloz, et al., 53.

- A home where trust and agency are nourished, hospitality is practiced, and the wider world is present;
- A neighborhood where it is safe to explore and discover different places and people;
- A community both within and beyond the neighborhood where physical, emotional, and intellectual safety is protected, and meaningful participation occurs;
- Intensive learning environments where group interaction is cultivated, responsibility is learned from shared tasks, and everyday experience can be brought into dialogue with larger meanings;
- Institutional environments (for example, day care centers, schools, youth groups, religious organizations, museums, libraries, work places) that sponsor positive forms of belonging and learning, cultivate an awareness of living on the global commons, and teach that it is possible to contribute to the larger public good;
- Places that provide for reflection and renewal in adult life and thus enhance the deepening of commitment.¹²¹

While the researchers found no single experience that ensured a committed life, they found one common thread in the life experience of everyone they studied. It was *a constructive engagement with otherness*. They found that a constructive encounter with others who are significantly different from oneself is key to the development of a capacity for trustworthy belonging and confident agency in a diverse and complex world, a capacity that transcends the traps of individualism and tribalism and enables people to become at home in the new commons.¹²² A constructive engagement with others intersects with feminist thought and the doctrine of the Trinity. Lacugna writes:

The critique of feminism shows that pure autonomy and pure heteronomy are destructive of persons. The doctrine of the Trinity helps us see that the true person is neither autonomous nor

¹²¹. Daloz, et al., 53.

¹²². Daloz, et al., 54.

heteronomous but *theonomous*: the human person is named with reference to its origin and destiny in God.¹²³

A major component of Parks, et al., research views the lives of those committed to the common good. They see elements of the common good as:

a global scope, a recognition of diversity, and a vision of society as composed of individuals whose own well-being is inextricably bound up with the good of the whole. The common good refers to the well-being of the whole earth community--its safety, the integrity of basic institutions and practices, and the sustaining of the living systems of our planet home. The common good also suggest broadly shared goals toward which the members of the community strive--human flourishing, prosperity and moral development. A recognition of the common good thus casts light on the significance of openness to new learning, critical and systemic thought, and the search for 'right naming'--images, metaphors, language--that convey the deepest truth of our common life.¹²⁴

Everything that promotes fullness of humanity, that builds up relationships based on charity and compassion, glorify God. Actively resisting injustice, prejudice and hatred can glorify God. Right relationship in every sphere, according to that which God has ordained, everything that brings human persons closer to the communion for which we were made, glorifies God.¹²⁵ Threshold people and hospitable and safe places glorify God. They are a people and a place that see others not as means to an end, nor as creatures designed to meet our relational needs, but persons in their own right who share the same destiny of glory. Threshold people and hospitable and safe places are needed to animate the life of the world and to usher in a glimpse of

123. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 290.

124. Daloz, et al., 16.

125. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 342-343.

the reign of God. LaCugna writes:

Entering into divine life is impossible unless we also enter into a life of love and communion with others. The truth about God and ourselves is that we were meant to exist as persons in communion in a common household, living as persons from and for others, not persons in isolation or withdrawal or self-centeredness.¹²⁶

As we view the life of the world from a trinitarian lens, an urgency calls forth the People of God for discernment and decisive action. We need a symbol of gentleness to call us back from our overbalanced reliance on aggression. We need a symbol of warmth to call us back from indifference. We need symbols of nurturance to call us back from our legalism. We need images of partnership and mutuality for men and women to share responsibility for tending the earth and its creatures.

126. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 382-383.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of the Trinity provides a framework for reflecting on the nature of the human person, on the relationship between humankind and all other creatures of the earth, and on the relationship between ourselves and God. Feminist theologians strive to actualize a new humanity in which women and men develop and use their gifts for the well-being of the common good. Minimally this calls for justice in the ecclesial and social orders. In its fullness it calls for mutual dependence and delight between men and women as they develop the fullness of their humanity in both relational, familial and institutional contexts.

As we read the signs of the time in our families, our church and in the world, we are called to return to our history and our collective human experience in order to recover something essential, something to do with a relational presence, a sense of our primordial bonds with one another and with the earth, a willingness to share responsibility for life. A renewed understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity recaptures the values of compassion, cooperation and mutuality. They are values that reveal the depth of what it means to be human; they are not gender specific. The doctrine of the Trinity call us to re-imagine a community of disciples who journey in hope and who minister in mutuality. A feminist ethic hopes for the transformation of the life of the family, church and world toward a way of life in which women are no longer silenced and oppressed but rather recognized and celebrated, and in which men and women are reconciled as partners serving God's creative and redemptive purposes.

In the current tensions that surround the life of the family, the church and the world, there is a certain irony of the Spirit at work. The institutional church is being confronted with

consequences of its own envisioning process, invited to listen to a 'play-back' of its teachings as they have been enfolded in the lives of believers who take seriously emphasis on the dignity of the human person and the gospel call to equality. Vatican II became the launching pad for a new energy in the church. It affirmed the movement toward greater expansiveness and global inclusiveness. It was the first visible sign.

We are all challenged to a deeper conversion and a more authentic way of life. Our practices must point back not to ourselves, but to God, or more specifically God's love. We must bear witness to God's love in the world. We must also do so in strong communities of Christians who participate in God's action in the world. LaCugna writes:

The Christian community is the image or icon of the invisible God when its communitarian life mirrors the inclusivity of divine love.¹²⁷

We are challenged to move beyond sexism to mutuality, beyond division to unity, beyond bitterness to reconciliation, beyond competition to collaboration. The mystery of God as Trinity, as final and perfect sociality, embodies those qualities of mutuality, reciprocity, cooperation, unity, peace in genuine diversity that are feminist ideals and goals derived from the inclusivity of the gospel message. The articulation of this vision is the triumph of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹²⁸ We are called to be a communion of persons where God and creature meet and unite and exist together as one. The goal is mutual care, respect and delight resulting in a participation in the divine life and a cooperation with God's activities in the world.

127. LaCugna, *God For Us*, 403.

128. Carr 156-157.

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