

# NEW PATTERNS OF RELATIONSHIP: BEGINNINGS OF A MORAL REVOLUTION

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**P**ATTERNS OF RELATIONSHIP between women and men are changing. Why they are changing, and how rapidly, are matters of debate. It may be that the chief forces for change are, e.g., economic.<sup>1</sup> Industrialization and the accompanying trend toward smaller, independent families accounts in part for husbands having to share in domestic tasks which stand-in female members of larger, extended families would have assumed. Technological development, which eliminates the requirement of physical strength for many occupations, accounts for the decrease in sex differentiation in portions of the work force. Mass media make feminist ideas accessible to otherwise isolated women, facilitating an unprecedented broadening of the base of challenge from women no longer willing to live within past role definitions. Rising affluence eliminates the need for parents to choose to educate sons in preference to daughters.

It may also be, however, that much of the change in patterns of relationship between men and women is more apparent than real. Some researchers claim, e.g., that despite the seeming loss of authority on the part of fathers, husbands still retain the preponderance of power in the family.<sup>2</sup> Feminist interpreters of life in society and the churches call attention to the fact that since the 1920's women have lost more ground than they have gained in their struggle to share in the public world.<sup>3</sup> Statistics show that in the United States women's growth numerically in the work force has not significantly changed their economic status vis-à-vis men.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the actual changes already realized in women's and men's social roles, there can be no doubt that there is an important change in

<sup>1</sup> See studies such as Harriet Holter, "Sex Roles and Social Change," in Hans Peter Dreitzel, ed., *Family, Marriage, and the Struggle of the Sexes* (New York, 1972) pp. 153-72. It must also be noted that there are economic causes which reinforce old patterns of relationship. See, e.g., the analysis of the effect of the Industrial Revolution on familial structures in Viola Klein, *The Feminine Character: History of An Ideology* (London, 1971) p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> See D. L. Gillespie, "Who Has the Power? The Marital Struggle," in Dreitzel, pp. 121-50.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Beverly Wildung Harrison, "Sexism and the Contemporary Church: When Evasion Becomes Complicity," in Alice L. Hageman, ed., *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church: No More Silence!* (New York, 1974) pp. 195-216.

<sup>4</sup> Figures in U.S. Bureau of Census Report 1970 show that median income of full-time employed women is half that of men.

persons' assessment of those roles. Sex roles have ceased to be unproblematic, accepted as a given. They are everywhere subject to critical appraisal—whether there is consensus on the critique or not. They have thus at least changed in so far as they have been raised to a level of reflective awareness. Often they have been changed in terms of legal rules, even if they have not yet really altered because of custom or attitude. In any case, for many persons profound conceptual and symbolic shifts have occurred in relation to gender differentiation and sex roles. Indeed, so profound are these changes and so far-reaching their consequences that one is tempted to say that they are to the moral life of persons what the Copernican revolution was to science or what the shift to the subject was to philosophy.

My concern in this essay, however, is less with what has already happened in interpersonal relationships than with what ought to happen. Patterns of relationship, self-understanding, sex roles, and gender differentiations ought to change. They ought to change because over-all they have been inadequate, based on inaccurate understandings of human persons, preventive of individual growth, inhibitive of the common good, conducive to social injustices, and in the Christian community not sufficiently informed by or faithful to the teachings of Christ.

The reasons for past inadequacies and inaccuracies of understanding regarding the relations between men and women are many. It is important to try to understand those reasons, for they help to disclose the need for present and future changes. We may, however, never be able finally to settle questions of, e.g., whether the Judeo-Christian tradition in the past was ultimately responsible for sexism in religion and culture, or whether it only suffered along with other components of human history under limitations imposed by economic, cultural, or psychological factors.<sup>5</sup> What is more important now, given a kind of fulness of time in human history (however prepared for by economic exigencies, technological supports, or whatever else), is to understand the reasons why patterns of relation ought to change.

#### ROLE FOR THEOLOGY AND ETHICS: FILLING THE HIATUS

Christian theology and ethics have an important role to play in articulating reasons for changes in patterns of relationship and in clarifying what the changes should be. They also have an important role in translating reasons into motives, in providing a climate within which conceptualization and symbolization can facilitate experiences of moral obligation. It is, after all, incumbent upon the Christian community no less than any other group in society (given its fundamental premises,

<sup>5</sup> See Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex* (Penguin, 1973).

perhaps more so) to consider what is right and just, loving and wise, called for by the gospel regarding human interpersonal relationships. Christian theology is the effort of the Christian community to articulate its faith, and Christian ethics is the effort of the Christian community to understand and articulate how its faith should be lived. But Christian faith does have something to do with relationships between persons, and Christian theological and ethical traditions have offered insights and guidelines, even principles and rules, regarding these relationships. They have done so, in fact, with some degree of specificity regarding sex roles.

### *Hiatus in the Revolution*

We are not now in a situation where Christian theology and ethics must simply provide a Christian commentary on general societal patterns which are questioned and/or in fact changing. We are rather in a situation where, precisely within the Christian community, for whatever reasons, many persons' ideas about sexual identity and gender roles have already changed. To understand the present task of theology, we need to look at the hiatus between past assumptions regarding fundamentally hierarchical patterns for relationship between men and women and today's growing acceptance of egalitarian patterns of relationship.

The "old order" was clearly one in which women were considered inferior to men and in which women's roles were subordinate, carefully circumscribed, and supplementary. Numerous studies have already documented the tendency of Christian theology to undergird this old order by identifying women with evil, by refusing to ascribe to women the fulness of the *imago dei*, and by defining women as derivative from and wholly complementary to men.<sup>6</sup> Beyond this, Christian theological ethics offered theories of justice which systematically excluded the possibility of criticizing sexism. Given the interpretations of women's "nature" as inferior, there was no question of violating the principle of giving "to each her due" when women were placed in subordinate positions or denied rights which were accorded to men. And given a concept of "order" in which one person should hold authority over others, justice was served precisely by the maintenance of a hierarchy—in family, church, or society—in which a male person stood at the head.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., such studies as Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York, 1975); George Tavard, *Woman and the Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame, 1973); Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism* (New York, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> For Aquinas' position in this regard, see, e.g., *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 92, a. 1; q. 93, a. 4; q. 96, a. 3; *On Kingship* 2, 17–20. It is almost superfluous to note here that so-called "pedestalism," whereby women were in some sense exalted as paragons of virtue, etc., served only to finally reinforce their subordination to a woman's "place."

The "new order," however, is based upon a view of women as autonomous human persons, as claimants of the rights which belong to all persons, as capable of filling roles of leadership in both the public and private spheres, as called to equality and full mutuality in relation to both men and women. It is difficult to exaggerate the radical nature of the shift in the perception of the reality of women and the consequent potential changes in relationships between persons (between men and women, but also between women and women and between men and men). Rilke spoke of a time when woman "will have stripped off the conventions of mere femininity in the mutations of her outward status," when "there will be girls and women whose name will no longer signify merely an opposite of the masculine, but something in itself, something that makes one think, not of any complement and limit, but only of life and existence: the feminine human being."<sup>8</sup> The "new order" is characterized by the belief that such a time has at least begun to be.

Now the hiatus between the old and the new orders is first of all one of understanding. For some Christians the process has been one of awakening, of unfolding, of conversion of thought if not of heart. For others, there has been no process at all. The new order of understanding is tacitly accepted, or at least not actively denied; but its implications are not at all seen. The new order cannot, however, either in logic or in persons' lives, simply be spliced to the old order as if it were another frame in an unwinding film. If there is to be growing clarity regarding social roles and individual identity, Bergson's "between" of process is as important as the beginning and the end. What is at stake is not only a Copernican revolution, where insight may be achieved in the flash of an eye, but a moral revolution wherein the Christian community's first obligation is to try to discern the claims of persons qua persons and the true common good of all persons.

The hiatus is also, of course, a hiatus between thought and reality and a hiatus between persons who behold a new order and those who do not. The gap in these senses is characterized differently in the different Christian traditions, so I shall limit my generalizations to the Roman Catholic tradition.<sup>9</sup> Here new understandings of the nature and role of women have not yet penetrated the pastoral teachings of the Church.<sup>10</sup> Unlike most other Christian traditions, even formal legal barriers to women's fuller participation in the life of the Church still remain. And

<sup>8</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, tr. M. D. H. Norton (New York, 1962) p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Thus far, more efforts have been made to analyze such situations in the Protestant churches than in the Roman Catholic; see Harrison, *art. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> This is eminently visible in even the 1975 statements of Paul VI regarding the International Women's Year.

obviously not all persons in the Church share the new understandings of social roles and interpersonal relationships or the new experiences of moral ought which are grounded in these understandings. Even those who do, readily admit that new patterns of relationship are not fully clear and that achievement of new self-understandings has not finally been realized.

### *Filling the Hiatus*

The task of theology has obviously something to do with bridging the gap. Nowhere is the hiatus more visible, in fact, than in theology itself. The work of transition from old to new understandings has hardly begun, and the revolution in thought which it entails cannot come full circle until the meaning and consequences of the new order are more adequately probed. What is needed, therefore, is not simply a further promulgation of new understandings, or a move by the theological community from tacit to spoken acceptance of new models of interpersonal and social relationships, or even exhortations of the community by theologians and ethicists. The task of theology is to engage precisely as theology and as theological ethics in the process whereby new understandings are born and develop.

The most obvious beginning work for theology in this regard is the self-critical work of disclosing past inaccuracies and distortions in theological interpretations of, e.g., the nature of woman and the role of sexuality in human life (a work well begun primarily by some few feminist theologians).<sup>11</sup> But theology has also a reconstructive task (if part of the movement in a revolution can be reconstructive as well as constructive) which will entail, e.g., efforts at a resymbolization of evil and a further probing of the doctrine of the *imago dei*. The reconstructive task of Christian ethics is derivative from and dependent upon the fruits of theological reflection, but it will inevitably involve new efforts to discern the moral imperatives rising from new understandings of the indicative regarding relations between persons. It is still the principles of Christian love and justice which must illuminate and regulate these relationships. There are, however, crucial considerations to be taken into account in the elaboration of these principles if they are to be faithful to Christian revelation as it is received in the concrete experience of the contemporary Christian community. What I should like to do in the remainder of this essay is to suggest key ways in which further considerations precisely of Christian love and justice can aid the process from old to new understandings of patterns of relationship between women and men and can thereby inform and give impetus to the moral

<sup>11</sup> See references in n. 6 above.

revolution which now promises to touch and reshape these relationships from the ground up.

#### ETHICAL RECONSTRUCTION

##### *New Patterns of Relationship: Relevance of Christian Love*

At first glance it seems a simple matter to apply the norms of Christian agape to patterns of relationship between persons. If agape means equal regard for all persons, then it requires that women be affirmed no less than men. If agape means a love that is self-sacrificing, then men as well as women are to yield one to the other, to know the meaning of sacrifice and surrender at the heart of their love for God and for human persons. If agape includes mutuality—as the gift it receives, if not the reward it seeks—then some form of equality is assumed in every Christian love.

Yet in the context of male-female relations, there have appeared throughout the centuries countless ambiguities regarding the form of agape when it is for a person precisely as man-person or as woman-person. Among other things, the very notions of equal regard, self-sacrifice, and mutuality become problematic. When agape has been understood as a graced love called forth and measured by the reality of the one loved (as it has been largely in the Roman Catholic tradition), then affirmation of a lesser share in life and in being for women than for men has been justified on the grounds that women are simply inferior to men.<sup>12</sup> When agape has been understood as indifferent to the reality of the one loved, coming forth “unmotivated” from the graced power of the one loving (as it has been in many of the Protestant traditions), then inequality in what is affirmed for women in relation to men has been justified by making love for women as women a “preferential” love, not under the norm of agape.<sup>13</sup> And while Christian love in all persons has indeed always included the notion of self-sacrifice, there have been ways of attributing that element of love especially to women—reinforcing, on the one hand, a sense of subservience in women, and leading, on the other hand, to such strange conclusions as that the woman is the “heart” of the family and the man is the “mind.”<sup>14</sup> Finally, the mutuality of love envisioned between men and women has seldom in theory included the full mutuality which is possible only in a relation marked by equality. It has, more often than not, found its analogues in the mutuality of

<sup>12</sup> *Sum. theol.* 1, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1 and 2.

<sup>13</sup> Such is the conclusion which can be drawn from, e.g., the theories of Kierkegaard or Nygren.

<sup>14</sup> “As he occupies the chief place in ruling, so she may and ought to claim for herself the chief place in love” (*Casti connubii*, no. 27).

relationships between parent and child, ruler and subject, master and servant.<sup>15</sup>

Many aspects of Christian love could be examined in an effort to reconstruct a Christian ethic which would aid the process to new patterns of relationship between women and men. The notions of equal regard, self-sacrifice, and mutuality offer particularly relevant areas for consideration, however, and it is in these areas that I would like to raise and to consider representative issues.

### Equal Regard and Equality of Opportunity

The notion of equal regard as a component of Christian agape has generally meant that all persons are to be loved with Christian love, regardless of their individual differences or their individual merit. They are to be loved, so the Roman Catholic tradition generally holds, because they are lovable precisely as persons (all beloved by God, all objects of the command to love them as we love ourselves).<sup>16</sup> Equal regard has not had sufficient content in the past, however, to save agapeic ethics from sexism; for, as we have seen, it is possible to affirm all persons as persons in a way that maintains a gradation among persons. All are loved as equal before God but not necessarily as equal before one another. When the norm of the objective reality of the person loved is added to the notion of equal regard, then the affirmation of persons as equals depends on the perception of their reality. Now it is just here that Christian ethics has suffered from an inadequate theology of the human person; for as long as the reality of woman is considered to be essentially lesser in being than the reality of man, she can be affirmed as personal but as essentially subordinate to men (in much the same way as children can be loved as persons without love demanding that they be affirmed in all the ways that adults are affirmed).

No one would argue that there are no differences between individual persons or that there are no differences between men and women. The question, of course, for a right love of women as human persons, is whether or not the differences between men and women are relevant in a way that justifies differentiating gender roles and consequent inequality of opportunity for women to participate in the public sphere or to determine the mode of their participation in the private sphere.

<sup>15</sup> These analogous polarities must not be thought to appear only in the Roman Catholic tradition. Reformation views of relationships between men and women did not revolutionize the pattern of hierarchy and subordination. See, e.g., Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* 1535 (WA 40, 543); *Commentary on Genesis* 1535-45 (WA 44, 704).

<sup>16</sup> For a general analysis of the meaning of "equal regard" see Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, 1972) chap. 1.

The primary method that theology used in the past to come to conclusions regarding the differences between women and men was a method of extrapolation from biological and sociopsychological data.<sup>17</sup> If theology is today consistent in its method in this regard, it has no choice but to reject its earlier position regarding the nature of woman. Evidence from the biological and behavioral sciences, from history and current practice, is overwhelmingly in contradiction to old claims regarding the intellectual superiority of men, the innate suitability of women and men for gender-specific social roles, the physiologically determined psychological patterns of women and men, etc.<sup>18</sup> What differences there are between women and men are not differences which justify gender-specific variations in a right to education, to work, to access to occupational spheres, to participation in political life, to just wages, to share in the burdens and responsibilities of family, society, and church. History clearly shows that efforts to restrict social roles on the basis of sex inevitably lead to inequities, to circumscription of persons in a way that limits the possibilities of growth in human and Christian life. A love which abstracts from the fundamental potentialities and needs of persons qua persons (in the name of attending to specific differences among persons) cannot finally be a Christian love which is a love of equal regard.

#### Self-Sacrifice and Active Receptivity

Self-sacrifice and servanthood go together as important concepts in Christians' understanding of a life of Christian love. In general, there is no difficulty in seeing them as part of the call of every Christian to a love which is like the love of Christ. Yet women have become conscious of the potential falsification of these concepts when they are tied to a pattern of submissiveness to men. As members of the contemporary Christian community, they have thus experienced grave difficulty in sharing the new enthusiasm of men for an understanding of Christian life and ministry in terms of servanthood and surrender. Women have long known their ministry (in home, society, or church) as a ministry of service, but they are painfully aware that for too long they have been primarily the servants of men, subject to the regulations of men, surrendered to the limitations imposed upon them by men. Thus it is that for women theological reflection on servanthood has come to focus

<sup>17</sup> This is not to deny that scriptural exegesis of, e.g., the story of creation has played an important part in theological reflection on the nature of woman. I would argue, however, that such exegesis served until recently proof-text conclusions drawn largely from other sources.

<sup>18</sup> It is, I hope, superfluous to document such an assertion, but it may be helpful to point to such studies as Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (New York, 1949) and Jean Strouse, ed., *Women and Analysis* (New York, 1974).

importantly on the revelation of service as a form of divine help, a role of privilege and responsibility, never "an indication of inferiority or subordination."<sup>19</sup>

Such clarifications would seem sufficient to restore a needed balance in patterns of relationship and ministry, preserving the fundamental elements of a surrendered and effective, free and whole love. But the ambiguities of sexual identity and culturally conditioned sexual roles are not so easily removed from actual efforts to live lives of Christian love. The process toward a "new order" calls for more careful analysis of the problems and opportunities in integrating sexual identity with agapeic love.

At the root of the difficulty in correcting false emphases in both women's and men's understandings of self-sacrifice, surrender, servanthood, etc., in Christian love, are false notions of receptivity. There is, I suggest, an implicit but direct connection between historical theological interpretations of woman as passive and historical difficulties in interpreting agape as active. In both cases receptivity constitutes a stumbling block.

It is, of course, a favorite theme in traditional interpretations of male-female relations to consider the feminine as passive and the masculine as active, the woman as receptacle and the man as fulfiller, the woman as ground and the man as seed. No other interpretation of the polarity between the sexes has had so long and deep-seated an influence on both men's and women's self-understanding. The source of this interpretation was primarily reflection on the reproductive structures of men and women. These structures served not only as symbols of male and female nature and roles, but they determined the meaning of the reality they symbolized. A perception of the function of bodily organs molded the consciousness of men and women for centuries. And there was no question that he who was an active principle was somehow greater in being than she who could be only a principle of passivity.<sup>20</sup>

Now in the history of Christian conceptualizations of agape, two trends are apparent. On the one hand, there has been a tendency to describe agape as wholly passively received in the human person from God and wholly actively given by the human person to his or her neighbor.<sup>21</sup> The primacy of the active principle is maintained in such a way that in the

<sup>19</sup> Letty M. Russell, "Women and Ministry," in Hageman, pp. 54-55.

<sup>20</sup> Were there space here, it would be interesting to speculate on the reasons for some variations on this theme. Thus, why did the seventeenth century sustain the myth of female passivity, yet give rise to a belief that women's sexuality was insatiable?

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, tr. P. Watson (New York, 1969) pp. 75-80, 92-95, 127; Outka, pp. 49-52; Norman Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (New York, 1969) pp. 174-75.

relation between God and the human person, only God can be active, and in the relation between the Christian and his or her neighbor, Christian agape must be wholly active.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, where there has been a theology of grace which allows for secondary causality and freedom, both activity and receptivity are allowed in the response of Christian agape to God and to neighbor. That is to say, love of God is receptive not only in the sense that the power and the act of love are received from God as grace, but in the sense that love for God is awakened by the received revelation of God's lovableness and responds in active affirmation; and love of neighbor is likewise awakened by the lovableness of the neighbor, and only when it is so awakened (when it has so received the beauty of the neighbor) is it an actively affirming response.<sup>23</sup> It is an important irony, however, that those theological traditions which have tended to allow both receptivity and activity in the integral reality of Christian love have also tended to identify woman with love and man with active mind.<sup>24</sup>

Now the fact that receptivity has been a stumbling block both in the self-understanding of women and some theologies of Christian love is readily apparent. We can see it first in the effort of women to transcend "old order" understandings of themselves. A major part of this effort has been the struggle of women to reject identification in terms of bodily structures. Voices raised in the women's movement five or six years ago were more often than not stressing the unacceptability of the "anatomy is destiny" dictum. They had come to see the inadequacies of traditional interpretations of the structure of the human self which tied sexual identity and social roles too closely to biological givens. A certain kind of identification with the body had to be transcended if women were to achieve the personal identity which had so long eluded them. A body objectified by the other had become objectified for the self; and too simple interpretations of bodily structures led to conclusions about women's identity which were in contradiction to women's own experience. The old understandings of body and woman and receptivity had to be left behind.

Similarly, flight from receptivity in modern theologies of Christian love parallels a general fear of receptivity in a modern age when for

<sup>22</sup>The major difficulties which this position sees with allowing agape to be active vis-à-vis God and receptive vis-à-vis one's neighbor are the difficulties of preserving total divine causality in grace and the difficulties of the emergence of egocentricity in "preferential" love.

<sup>23</sup>This view of agape is found most representatively in the Roman Catholic tradition of a theology of Christian love.

<sup>24</sup>See n. 14 above.

Sartrean man "to receive is incompatible with being free,"<sup>25</sup> and for "protean man" everywhere there is a "suspicion of counterfeit nurturance."<sup>26</sup> But such fears are the result of an experience and an interpretation of receptivity which is oppressive, deceiving in its illusory offer of meaning and happiness, destructive in its enforced passivity. It is not only women but all persons who can sense that certain forms of receptivity, of passivity and submission, are not appropriate for the human person and never truly constitutive of Christian love.

New light can be shed, however, on the meaning of receptivity for all persons. Women have found important access to that light, paradoxically, by returning to considerations of bodily structures. Their move to transcend reference to bodily structures and processes was never complete; for at the same time that women were rejecting anatomical determinism, they were also taking more seriously their relation to their own bodies, seeking a way to integrate embodiment with personal selfhood and womanhood. The very forcefulness of the negation of the body as sole determinant of identity and social function allowed an undercurrent of interest in a feminist rediscovery of the body to emerge dialectically as a major theme for today's voices in the women's movement.

In their efforts to reclaim their bodies, women finally took seriously the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which showed, e.g., that even at the physiological level the female body is never only a receptacle for male sperm. Knowledge about the ovum, and the necessity of two entities (sperm and ovum) meeting in order to form a new reality, forever ruled out the analogy of the earth receiving a seed which was whole in itself and only in need of nourishment to grow.<sup>27</sup> Suddenly enwombing took on a different meaning, and inseeding had to be conceptualized in a different way. Even the passivity of the waiting womb had to be reinterpreted in the face of discoveries of its active role in aiding the passage of the sperm. Receptivity and activity began to coincide.

There are dangers, of course, in women's new efforts to understand and

<sup>25</sup> Marcel puts these words in the mouth of the early Sartre; see Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, tr. M. Harari (New York, 1964) p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, "Protean Man," in *The Religious Situation: 1969*, ed. D. Cutler (Boston, 1969) p. 824.

<sup>27</sup> While the ovum was discovered only in the nineteenth century, Hippocrates had taught that woman's participation in reproduction includes a positive contribution. This was taken up into philosophy and theology by the Franciscan school in the Middle Ages, but there was as yet no acknowledgment of equal contributions from male and female principles. The male contribution was considered "efficient cause," and the female contribution still "material cause." See Bonaventure, *In Sent.* 2, d. 20, q. 2.

to live their embodiment. First, if it is only women who take seriously human existence as embodied, they may simply reinforce past stereotypes which identify woman with body and man with mind. Secondly, if women fall into the trap which Freud did—i.e., by taking account of the body in only some of its manifestations and not the body as a whole—distortions will once again be introduced into the self-understanding of both men and women. Thus, e.g., to fail to see all the ways in which, even at a physical level, men's bodies receive, encircle, embrace, and all the ways women's bodies are active, giving, penetrating, is to undermine from the start any possibility of growing insight into patterns of mutuality in relationships between persons.<sup>28</sup> Finally, there is the danger of forgetting that bodily structures and processes, whether in themselves or as symbolic of something beyond themselves, cannot provide the key to the whole of personal identity. They do, after all, demand to be transcended, so that we come to recognize all the possibilities of activity and receptivity which belong to both men and women, not as masculine and feminine poles of their beings, but as full possibilities precisely as feminine or precisely as masculine.

But if insight can be gained into active receptivity and receptive activity at the level of human embodiment, there is also a way to further insight in the experience of Christian agape. Receptivity is indeed at the heart of Christian love, and it does indeed lead finally to receptive surrender and to a life of active and receptive self-sacrifice. But it may be that we can grasp the meaning of receptivity in Christian agape only by seeing it in the broader context of Christian faith. Theological interpretations of Christian beliefs have pointed to a mystery of receptivity in the life of God Himself, in the incarnation of the Son, his life, death, resurrection, and return to the Father, in the dwelling of the Spirit in the Church, in the life of grace which is the sharing of human persons in the life of the triune God. "The Father, who is the source of life, has made the Son the source of life" (Jn 5:26). "I can do nothing by myself . . . my aim is to do not my own will but the will of Him who sent me" (Jn 5:30). "God gives the Spirit without reserve. The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to him" (Jn 3:34-35). The Son's incarnate existence as God-man is an existence of receiving, of utter openness to the Father, of finally receptive surrendering unto death, and in death beyond death

<sup>28</sup> This, I take it, constitutes a morally significant factor in understanding homosexuality as well as heterosexual relations. There is not the opportunity here to pursue this topic, but it is of utmost importance to juxtapose these insights with the testimony of the contemporary gay community that the "new generation" of homosexuals does not reject their given sexual identity even though their sexual preference is for persons of the same sex.

into life, and into new assumption into the life of the Father.<sup>29</sup> The Church is alive with that same life only because and in so far as it receives the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Father (Jn 4:14, 6:37, 14:15-19, 15:5-5). Human persons, subsistent receptors of their very being, awaken into life and consciousness, into love and communion, even into the love of God and communion with Him and all persons in Him, only through the mystery of their capacity to receive, their possibility of utter openness to the creative and created word of God.

Christian love, no less and indeed radically more so than any other form of human love,<sup>30</sup> is essentially receptive in relation to both God and neighbor. It is God's self-communication which enables Christian love, and that self-communication includes the manifestation of His lovable-ness for the conscious reception in and response of Christian love. And Christian love of neighbor is radical love not in that it involves no reception of the one loved, but because the one loved is received according to his or her deepest reality (her existence in God in Christ Jesus) and responded to with an active affirmation that reaches to that reality.

But all this receptivity at the heart of Christian existence is not in any way only passivity. "To receive," as Marcel has noted, can mean anything from passive undergoing to a receiving which is an active giving, as when a host "receives" a guest.<sup>31</sup> The receiving which is the Son's in relation to the Father is an infinitely active receiving. The receiving which is each human person's from God, and from one another within a life shared in God, is an active participation in the active receptivity of Christ, awakening, growing, reaching to the coincidence of peak receptivity with peak activity. Theologians who worry that if agape is active in relation to God, God's power will not be preserved, or theologians who worry that if agape is receptive of neighbor it will inevitably be a self-centered love, fail to understand that receiving can be self-emptying, and giving can be self-fulfilling. They fail to see the meeting between lover and beloved (whether God or a human person) which is utterly receptive but utterly active, a communion in which the beloved is received and affirmed, in which receiving and giving are but two sides of one reality which is other-centered love. Theologians or any persons who persist in identifying woman with love and man with knowledge, or who neglect to find in self-sacrificial love the coincidence of opposites (giving

<sup>29</sup> For a brief but excellent summary of the element of receptivity in the life of Jesus, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York, 1963) pp. 25-30.

<sup>30</sup> See Jules J. Toner, *The Experience of Love* (Washington, D.C., 1968) p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> See Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, tr. R. Rosenthal (New York, 1964) pp. 89-91.

and receiving), fail to understand the reality of either man or woman and fail to see the absurdity of withholding the possibilities of great Christian love from the heart of all persons.

### Mutuality on a Trinitarian Model

There is a further step that we can take in trying to understand the reality of women and men, the nature of the love which can be between them, and the model of interpersonal relationship which is offered to them in Christian revelation. That step is to the doctrine of God. It is suggested by the fact that Christian theology has failed to grant equality to women precisely in so far as it has failed to attribute to women the fulness of the image of God. All persons are created in the image and likeness of God, but men participate in the *imago dei* primarily and fully, while women have long been thought to participate in it secondarily and partially. It is not surprising, then, that the only way to move beyond a long-standing inability to conceptualize and actualize patterns of relationship which do not depend upon a hierarchical model is to see whether sexual identity does indeed give graded shares in the *imago dei*. At the same time we may see whether God's own self-revelation includes a revelation of a model of interpersonal love which is based upon equality and infinite mutuality.

If we are to pursue the question of whether women as women can be understood to be in the image of God, we must ask whether God can be imaged in feminine as well as masculine terms.<sup>32</sup> The Christian community has traditionally tried to articulate its understanding of the inner life of God in the doctrine of the Trinity, and it is here that we might expect to find also the fullest meaning for the *imago dei*. Certain cautions, however, are in order. First, the Christian doctrine of God has never ceased to affirm that God is a transcendent God whose reality is beyond all of our images and who cannot be understood to be either masculine or feminine. Nonetheless, we do use images to help our understanding of God; and since God holds all the fulness of being, it is as legitimate to say that the perfections of masculinity and femininity are in God as to say that they are not in God. There will, of course, be radical limitations to any use of masculine or feminine images of God; but there are radical limitations to the use of any images—including those of fatherhood and sonship, or those of word and wisdom, or those of memory, understanding, and will.

<sup>32</sup>This does not eliminate the need to consider woman as person participating in the *imago dei*. To go to this without considering also woman as woman participating in the *imago dei* does not, however, meet the historical problem of identifying man as the primary sharer in the image of God.

It is important for us to bear in mind, however, two special limitations of masculine and feminine imagery. (1) Given no history of careful delimitation of the imagery (such as we do have for the images of fatherhood and sonship), constant care must be taken to place it within a clear affirmation of the unity of God.<sup>33</sup> (2) Any use of masculine or feminine imagery, whether in relation to God or not, runs the risk of being caught once again in reifying notions of the masculine and the feminine. I shall say more about this second concern later.

There are, I suggest, in traditional Roman Catholic Trinitarian theology,<sup>34</sup> grounds for naming each of the persons in the Trinity feminine as well as masculine. "Fatherhood" is the image traditionally used for the First Person of the Trinity. In the first two centuries of Christian thought it connoted primarily the Godhead as the creator and author of all things,<sup>35</sup> but it soon began to signify the unoriginated "begetting" by the First Person of the Second Person. The exclusive appropriateness of the image of fatherhood is beyond question in an age when the sole active principle in human generativity was thought to be male. No absolute necessity remains for limiting the image to that of masculine generativity, however, when it becomes clear (as it has in our own day) that the feminine principle of generativity is also active and self-contributing. There is, in other words, no reason why the First Person of the Trinity cannot be named "Mother" as well as "Father," no reason why creation cannot be imaged as coming forth from the ultimate womb, from the ultimate maternal principle. Neither image is sufficient (since in the human analogue neither male nor female principle can be the whole source of life), but either is appropriate; and perhaps only with both do we begin to return the power to images which they had in a simpler day.

"Sonship" is the image traditionally used for the Second Person of the Trinity. Once again, the appropriateness of this image is unquestionable in an age when human sons were the always desired human offspring, and when relationships between fathers and sons could often be marked with greater equality and mutuality than could those between husband and wife.<sup>36</sup> But there is, again, no absolute reason why the Second Person cannot be named "Daughter" as well as "Son." There is, on the contrary,

<sup>33</sup>In other words, not only must modalism be eschewed but "social" theories of the godhead as well; see Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York, 1952) pp. 29-34, 133-51, 252-72.

<sup>34</sup>These same reflections could be applied to the Trinitarian theology of, e.g., Karl Barth.

<sup>35</sup>See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, 1958) pp. 83-95.

<sup>36</sup>I am passing over here the question of the influence of reflection on the Incarnation on these views; see Kelly, chaps. 4-5.

good reason to suggest that the Second Person is better imaged when both the images of sonship and daughterhood are used.<sup>37</sup>

There is, however, another way in which feminine imagery may be ascribed to the Second Person of the Trinity. A large part of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity is a history of attempts to express the relationship between the First and Second Persons in a way that avoids subordinationism. From the Apologists to the Council of Nicaea the attempts were unsuccessful. Nicaea affirmed the equality and the unity of the two Persons, but the images still faltered.<sup>38</sup> "Fatherhood" and "sonship" (even when elaborated upon in terms of Father and Logos or light, etc.) were simply not capable of bearing the whole burden of the reality to be imaged.

With Augustine new images were introduced (being, knowing, willing; mind, self-knowledge, self-love; memory, understanding, will) which described a triune life in which all that the Father is is communicated to the Son, and all that the Son receives is returned to the Father, and the life of utter mutuality, communion, which they share, is the Spirit.<sup>39</sup> This life—imaged by analogues from the human mind—is still attributed, however, to Persons whose primary names are "Father" and "Son" (and "Spirit"). It is the further elaboration of this same basic description which is to be found in the rest of the history of the theology of the Trinity in the Western Church and in the official teachings of the Church.<sup>40</sup>

Given this articulation of the life of the Trinity, however, is it not possible to introduce images of masculinity and femininity which are no longer those of parent and child? Does not a feminine principle of creative union, a spousal principle, express as well as sonship the relation of the Second Person to the First? Is not the Second Person revealed as infinite receptor, in whom peak receptivity is identical with peak activity? Is it not possible on this account to describe the First Person as masculine and the Second Person as feminine and the bond which is the infinite communion between them (the Spirit of both) as necessarily both masculine and feminine? Do we not have here revealed a relationship in which both the First Person and the Second Person are infinitely active and infinitely receptive, infinitely giving and infinitely

<sup>37</sup> Tavad suggests the view that the Holy Spirit be considered as imaging daughterhood in the Trinity. This does not, it seems to me, adequately account for the theology of spiration. See Tavad, p. 198.

<sup>38</sup> Athanasius, e.g., still needed to draw upon such images as "stream" and "source" to try to express the relation of Father and Son. The Cappadocians still referred to the Father as cause and the Son as caused.

<sup>39</sup> *De trin.* 5, 12; 5, 15-17; 8, 1; 15, 5 and 10; *In Ioan tract.* 99, 6.

<sup>40</sup> For a concise summary of the official doctrine of the Church regarding the Trinity, see Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, tr. J. Donceel (New York, 1970) pp. 58-79.

receiving, holding in infinite mutuality and reciprocity a totally shared life? Do we not have here, in any case, a model of relationship which is not hierarchical, which is marked by total equality, and which is offered to us in Christian revelation as the model for relationship with Christ and for our relationships in the Church with one another?

But let me return here to the caution I noted earlier, namely, that to use the images of masculinity and femininity to represent the Godhead runs the risk of sealing yet more irrevocably the archetypes of the eternal masculine and the eternal feminine. The God of Christianity is a transcendent God, one who breaks all archetypes and who can continually call us beyond their limitations in our own lives. It is surely the case that we do not want to find yet one more way to imprison women or men in what are finally falsifying notions of gender identity. We began these considerations, however, as part of a process—a process which may in fact lead necessarily beyond all sexual imagery to notions only of transcendence. What is important is that there be room in the process for women to know themselves as images of God, as able to be representatives of God as well as lovers of God. In addition, we cannot dismiss out of hand the possibility of finding in God's self-revelation grounds for understanding femininity in a way that begins to shatter its previous conceptual limitations, and that begins even to revolutionize archetypes. Finally, both the struggle of Trinitarian theology through the centuries to deny any subordination of the Second Person to the First, and the struggle of women and men to achieve equality and mutuality in more and more patterns of relationship, may well be served by adding the image of masculine-feminine polarity to past images of fatherhood and sonship.

### *New Patterns of Relationship: Relevance of Christian Justice*

#### The Good of the Individual

There is a sense in which, once we have considered the norms of Christian love vis-à-vis patterns of relationship between women and men, we have already also considered the norms of Christian justice. At least in the theory of Christian justice to which I would subscribe, justice is itself the norm of love. What is required of Christians is a just love, a love which does indeed correspond to the reality of those loved. Thus, in a strict sense, justice requires that we affirm for persons, both women and men, what they reasonably need in order to live out their lives as full human persons and, within the Christian community, what they need in order to grow in their life of faith. It is therefore clear that to refuse to persons, on the basis of their sex, their rightful claim to life, bodily security, health, freedom of self-determination, religious worship, educa-

tion, etc., is to violate the norms of a just love. Any pattern of relationship, in home, church, or civil society, which does not respect persons in these needs and claims is thereby an unjust pattern of relationship.

We have already seen the demand which a just love then makes for rejecting institutionalized gender differentiations and for affirming equality of opportunity for all persons regardless of their sex. Feminists have sometimes gone beyond an egalitarian ethic, however, to a "liberation" ethic in their delineation of the norms of justice for society and the churches.<sup>41</sup> The liberation ethic, in this sense, asserts that equal access to institutional roles is not sufficient to secure justice, since institutions and roles are themselves at present oppressive to persons. The reality of both men and women is such that "the social institutions which oppress women as women also oppress people as people"<sup>42</sup> and must be altered to make a more humane existence for all. While the goal of a liberation ethic is ultimately the common good, it nonetheless asserts important claims for a just love in terms of the reality of individuals who are loved.

### The Common Good

If traditional principles of justice are to be brought to bear in forming new patterns of relationship, then it is not only the good of individuals which must be taken into account but the common good of all. It is just here that moral discourse often breaks down when arguments are advanced for basic egalitarian patterns of relationship between men and women. At least three important areas of consideration suggest themselves if we are to discern seriously the moral imperatives in this regard.

1) From the standpoint of the Roman Catholic ethical tradition, it is a mistake to pit individual good against the good of the community, or the social good, when what is at stake is the fundamental dignity of the individual. If it is the case, then, that the reality of woman is such that a just love of her demands that she be accorded fundamental personal rights, including equality of opportunity in the public world, then to deny her those rights is inevitably to harm the common good. "The origin and primary scope of social life is the conservation, development and perfection of the human person. A social teaching or reconstruction program . . . when it disregards the respect due the human person and to the life which is proper to that person, and gives no thought to it in its organization, in legislation and executive activity, then instead of serving

<sup>41</sup>See analysis in Jo Freeman, "The Women's Liberation Movement: Its Origins, Structures, and Ideas," in Dreitzel, pp. 213-16.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 214. This is the argument given by some women against ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

society, it harms it. . . .”<sup>43</sup> On the basis of such a view of the common good, all arguments for refusing women equality of opportunity for the sake of safeguarding the “order” of society, church, or family must fall.

2) In the “old order,” as we have seen, it was argued that the common good (which consisted primarily in some form of unity) could best be achieved by placing one person at the head of any community. Strong utilitarian rebuttals can now be offered against this view of the nature of authority.<sup>44</sup> The tradition from which it comes has itself shifted, through the adoption of the principle of subsidiarity, from a hierarchical to an egalitarian model of social organization in contexts of civil society.<sup>45</sup> To extend the shift to include relationships between men and women, it is necessary to argue that in fact the good of the family, church, etc. is better served by a model of leadership which includes collaboration between equals.

Thus, e.g., it can be argued that present familial structures which give major responsibility for the rearing of children to the mother do not, after all, provide the greatest good for children.<sup>46</sup> Or familial structures which entail a sharp split between the public and private worlds entail also strains on marital commitment<sup>47</sup> and a dichotomy between public and private morality.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, ecclesiastical structures which reserve leadership roles to men do not provide the needed context for all persons to grow in the life of faith. Within the confines of such structures God is not represented in the fulness of triune life, and the vacuum which ensues is filled by false forms of chauvinism in the clergy and religiosity in the congregations. On the basis of this form of argument, hierarchical patterns of relationship are judged unjust not only because they violate the reality of individual persons but because they inhibit or undermine the common good.

3) If the ultimate normative model for relationships between persons is the very life of the Trinitarian God, then a strong eschatological ethic suggests itself as a context for Christian justice. That is to say,

<sup>43</sup> Pius XII, Christmas Address, 1942, in Vincent A. Yzermans, ed., *The Major Addresses of Pope Pius XII 2* (St. Paul, 1969) 54

<sup>44</sup> Other forms of rebuttal, on deontological grounds, can be offered as well. These may be inferred, however, from our discussion thus far.

<sup>45</sup> See the historical analysis of this shift in David Hollenbach, *The Right to Procreate and its Social Limitations: A Systematic Study of Value Conflict in Roman Catholic Ethics* (unpubl. diss., Yale University, 1975) chap. 3.

<sup>46</sup> See Alice S. Rossi, “Equality between the Sexes, An Immodest Proposal,” in Robert J. Lifton, ed., *The Woman in America* (Boston, 1964) pp. 105–15.

<sup>47</sup> See Martha Baum, “Love, Marriage, and the Division of Labor,” in Dreitzel, pp. 83–106.

<sup>48</sup> See Beverly Wildung Harrison, “Ethical Issues in the Women’s Movement,” address given to the American Society of Christian Ethics, 1974.

interpersonal communion characterized by equality, mutuality, and reciprocity may serve not only as a norm against which every pattern of relationship may be measured but as a goal to which every pattern of relationship is ordered. Minimal justice, then, may have equality as its norm and full mutuality as its goal. Justice will be maximal as it approaches the ultimate goal of communion of each person with all persons and with God. Such a goal does not merely beckon from the future; it continually impinges upon the present, demanding and promising that every relationship between women and men, and between women and women and men and men, be at least turned in the direction of equality and opened to the possibility of communion.

The kinds of changes that are needed in the patterns of relationship between women and men are changes which are finally constituted in and by a moral revolution. It is difficult to imagine how such changes can be effected without a continuing process of conversion of thought and of love in the individual and in the community. I began this essay by suggesting that theology and ethics have an important role to play in such a process. Theological and moral insight do not come easily, however, in areas where centuries of thought and behavior have skilled us in selective vision. Surely some structures will have to change before minds and hearts can change. Surely laws and structures can begin to change without filling the hiatus between old and new understandings. We are talking, however, about a revolution that must occur in the most intimate relations as well as the most public. Without continuing changes in understanding and love, I doubt that we shall be able to effect sufficiently radical structural changes in the public sphere or structural changes at all in the world of our private lives. "We may sometimes decide to act abstractly by rule . . . and we may find that as a result both energy and vision are unexpectedly given . . . but if we do leap ahead of what we know we still have to try to catch up. Will cannot run very far ahead of knowledge, and attention is our daily bread."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York, 1971) p. 44.