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THE ROLE OF THE POPES IN THE INVENTION OF COMPLEMENTARITY AND THE VATICAN'S ANATHEMATIZATION OF GENDER

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The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Vatican's Anathematization of Gender

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Mary Anne Case*

Abstract

This article examines the origins and uses by the Vatican of the theological anthropology of complementarity, arguing that the doctrine of complementarity, under which the sexes are essentially different though not unequal, is an invention of the twentieth century untraceable in earlier centuries, but developed by, among others, the Popes from Pius XII through Benedict XVI, in part as a response to feminist claims, including those recently anathematized by the Vatican under the term "gender." After exploring some difficulties with the application of the doctrine of complementarity as Catholic orthodoxy, the article concludes by compiling preliminary evidence as to the extent Pope Francis will continue his predecessors' approach to complementarity.

Keywords

Vatican, gender, complementarity, theological anthropology, Benedict XVI, John Paul II, Pius XII

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Introduction

In November 2014, just a month after concluding a much more widely publicized and liberally inclined Extraordinary Synod on the Family, Pope Francis personally welcomed an international who's who of self-described proponents of traditional marriage and opponents of same-sex marriage from diverse faith traditions and continents to the Vatican for an International Colloquium on the Complementarity between Man and Women ('Humanum Conference')¹ sponsored by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ('CDF'). For the Vatican, complementarity entails that 'man and woman' have 'equal dignity as persons' but that this equal dignity is premised on and manifest in essential and complementary differences, 'physical, psychological and ontological.'(Ratzinger 2004). The differences the Vatican has in mind as

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¹ See <http://humanum.it/>.

essential include most of what secular law would characterize as sex stereotypes,² a term many activist proponents of complementarity embrace rather than repudiate (Kuby 2008).

In this article,³ I will trace developments over the course of the last half century that brought the Vatican first to embrace sexual complementarity as the foundation of its theological anthropology and then to mobilize that anthropology in an attempt to influence secular law in settings as diverse as the United Nations' 1995 Beijing Conference on Women and the *Manif Pour Tous*, the protest movement that brought thousands of French citizens out to demonstrate against the inclusion of same-sex couples in a law extending '*Marriage Pour Tous*' (Marriage for Everyone) in the spring of 2013.

Over the course of the same half century, the Vatican and those operating under its influence around the world came to view the English word 'gender' as anathema and to associate the word with what it terms an 'ideology of gender' it sees as linking feminism and gay rights in a worldwide effort to redefine, not only secular laws governing the sexes, sexuality, reproduction, and the family, but human nature itself. As a result, the Vatican, in venues ranging from the United Nations to legislative bodies and protest movements in every part of the world, has opposed not only these changes in secular law and the NGOs and activists it sees as conspiring to bring them about, but the very use of the word 'gender' itself, whether in scholarly work or in legal documents.

This article will argue that, far from being longstanding Catholic orthodoxy, complementarity is a mid-twentieth century innovation imported into Catholicism at a theoretical level through the work of converts such as the married former Protestant Dietrich von Hildebrand and at a more pastoral and political level by members of the Catholic hierarchy such as Pope Pius XII trying to reconcile commitments to separate spheres and the equality of the sexes. The move from the invention of complementarity to the anathematization of gender is largely a tale of three popes: Paul VI, who, in response to what he saw as dangerous trends of the times, promulgated documents newly entrenching Catholic opposition to contraception (*Humanae Vitae*, 1968), homosexuality (*Persona Humana*, 1975) and women's ordination (*Inter Insigniores*, 1976); John Paul II, who brought the philosophical work he had done as Carol Wojtyla to his *Theology of the Body* and *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988); and finally, Benedict XVI, who combined concerns about feminism, the new reproductive technologies, and LGBT rights he had voiced as a connected whole as early as *The Ratzinger Report* (Ratzinger 1985) into his notion of a human ecology at risk of destruction by all he saw as encompassed by the term 'gender.'

In addition to the invention of complementarity, a second crucial component to the intellectual history on which this article rests is the parallel development of two different meanings for the term 'gender' among the sort of feminist intellectuals and activists Ratzinger set his face against. Also in the mid-twentieth century, English-speaking scholars of women's studies and scientific researchers into sex differences used 'gender' to distinguish cultural or attitudinal characteristics associated with the sexes from biological characteristics (i.e. to distinguish masculine and feminine from male and female). Simultaneously, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in the

² A stereotype in this context amounts to an imperfect proxy: it is something normatively or descriptively associated with one sex or the other, but not categorically true of all members of that sex and/or not categorically false with respect to all members of the other sex. Stereotypes, or 'fixed notions concerning the roles and abilities of males and females' should not, in the view, for example, of the U.S. Supreme Court and of the drafters of CEDAW, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, be used to limit the opportunities of individuals of any sex. For further discussion see (Case 2000).

³ This article is part of a larger project on the Vatican and gender, which includes (Case 2011) and (Case forthcoming 2016).

1970s the leading U.S. litigator for constitutional sex equality and now a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, used the term ‘gender’ interchangeably with ‘sex’ in legal documents, to ward off from the minds of judges what she feared might be the distracting association of ‘sex’ with what happens in porn theaters (Ginsburg 1975); her use of ‘gender’ rapidly spread to other writers of legal documents written in English. These two uses of the term ‘gender,’ the academic and the legal, may seem antithetical, with the first stressing the distinction between sex and gender, the second using the terms interchangeably and synonymously. But, from the Vatican’s perspective, there was the same reason to be concerned about both usages: each is associated with what Ratzinger condemned as ‘the obscuring of the difference or duality of the sexes’ in the 2004 Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of M[a]n and Wom[a]n in the Church and in the World⁴ he issued as head of the CDF (Ratzinger 2004).

A third component of the history is how, in reaction to this perceived danger, the Vatican anathematization of gender spread through the world, beginning with preliminary concerns of Catholic activists at the United Nations Rio, Cairo, and Beijing conferences in the first half of the 1990s; and continuing through the proclamations of Harvard Law professor and Vatican ambassador to the 1995 Beijing conference Mary Ann Glendon, subsequent polemics of figures like French Lacanian psychoanalyst priest Tony Anatrella, and documents such as the Pontifical Council on the Family’s massive *Lexicon of Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions*; to influence debates about secular law reform in venues such as the U.N., the E.U., and the French National Assembly, including debates about both specific law reforms such as recognition of same-sex marriage and broader approaches to sex equality in law and policy such as what came to be known as gender mainstreaming.⁵

The article will conclude with an analysis of the effect of Pope Francis’s own worldview on the Vatican’s opposition to what it calls the ideology of gender, detailing evidence that leads to pessimistic conclusions about the likelihood of the new Pope committing his Church to a new vision of freedom or equality when it comes to gender.

The Invention of Complementarity

In his book *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, Mark Jordan claims to be able to find ‘no trace of the term before the eleventh century’ when it was ‘invented by medieval theologians.’ (Jordan 1997: 2) Similarly, neither I nor the staunchest Catholic supporters of an ideology of complementarity, despite their heroic efforts to seek its roots in prior centuries, have found any trace of the term ‘complementarity’ before the twentieth century. Consider for example, the work of Sister Prudence Allen, recently named by Pope Francis to the overwhelmingly male International Theological Commission, which advises the CDF. Sr. Allen was one of the principal speakers at the Humanum Conference⁶. Although she has published

⁴I have made the alteration in the title of this document because, although the official English translation speaks of the ‘Collaboration of Men and Women,’ the Italian and every other official language I can read speaks of the sexes in the singular – as ‘Uomo e ... Donna’ as ‘Mann und Frau,’ i.e. as ‘Man and Woman.’ The use in particular of ‘woman’ in the singular, as an essential or ideal type, is one of the most problematic aspects of the theological anthropology of complementarity.

⁵ Gender mainstreaming became a term of art for the U.N. and many of its member states following the 1995 Beijing Final Report and Platform for Action’s repeated recommendations that ‘[g]overnments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes’ (Beijing Declaration 1995).

⁶ I am grateful to Sr. Allen for sharing her unpublished drafts with me.

nearly twelve hundred pages in two volumes of a history of *The Concept of Woman from 750 B.C. to A.D. 1500*, the word ‘complementarity’ appears in none of the cited sources. As she herself documents, in prior centuries, those who stressed the equality of the sexes also stressed their essential sameness, while those who focused on essential differences between the sexes also asserted the superiority of men, whether it be the Pythagoreans who associated male with goodness and light, female with badness and darkness; Aristotle, who thought of women as misbegotten males; or Thomas Aquinas, who followed Aristotle in this and who gave as his principal reason why a woman could not become a priest that, "since then there cannot be signified in the feminine sex any eminence of degree, since woman holds a state of subjection; therefore [she] cannot receive the sacrament of orders" (Aquinas 1856: IV, d. 25, q. 2, a.1).⁷ The closest Sr. Allen comes to early traces of what later became complementarity is in the work of the twelfth century abbess and mystic Hildegard von Bingen, who, according to Sr. Allen, ‘developed a theoretical framework within which sex complementarity could be articulated as a philosophy of sex identity’ (Allen 1997: 253)⁸. It is therefore no accident that one of Benedict XVI’s last major acts, in October of 2012, before announcing his resignation in February 2013, was to declare Hildegard to be, like Thomas Aquinas, a Doctor of the Church, that is to say one of now four women and thirty two men whose writings are to be seen as authoritative and influential, albeit not infallible.⁹

I can find no trace of sexual complementarity in the Gospels. Even the Virgin Mary, model of ‘the woman’ for complementarians like John Paul II, displays few stereotypically feminine traits and a fair degree of feistiness.¹⁰ Not only do the apostles display few identifiably masculine traits, both Jesus’s treatment of women and the behavior attributed to women in the Gospels is remarkably free of gender stereotypes. As for sex role differentiation, far from endorsing it, Jesus explicitly repudiates it, sending women out to preach and rebuking Martha for demanding that her sister Mary be forced to join her in household tasks.¹¹

In the Epistles there is more fodder for complementarians, particularly in the discussion of marital roles and in the analogy, crucial for the theological anthropology of complementarity, between husband and wife on the one hand, and Christ and the Church on the other. But, true to form, when Paul speaks of difference between the sexes, he also speaks of subordination (‘Wives, be subject to your husbands.... Husbands, love your wives....’ Colossians 3:18, 19). When he speaks of equality, it is equality in non-differentiation. (‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.’ Galatians 3:28). The language of Colossians leads many Protestant denominations and their theologians, including, for example, the Southern Baptists and the President of their Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Russell D. Moore, who was a principal speaker at the Humanum Conference, explicitly to reject egalitarian marriage in favor of ‘patriarchy’ and the doctrine of

⁷ Translation courtesy of Mark Jordan.

⁸ Hildegard wrote that ‘Woman is weak and looks up to man to provide for her, just as the moon receives its strength from the sun. For this reason she is subject to man and should always be prepared to serve him’ (De Operatione Dei, I. 4, 65) quoted in (Newman 1987: 95).

⁹ Note that among Benedict XVI’s classmates when he studied theology at the University of Munich was Elisabeth Goessman, who, as a professor specialized in Hildegard von Bingen and in the long history of arguments for the equality of the sexes.

¹⁰ See e.g. her cross-examination of the angel of the Annunciation, Luke 1:34, and her refusal to take her son’s ‘no’ for an answer at the wedding feast in Cana, John 2:3-5. Note also that at the Annunciation, she speaks of not having known a man rather than of a man not having known her, thus taking on for herself the active description of the sex act as knowledge usually ascribed to males.

¹¹ Luke 10:40-42.

‘male headship and wifely submission’ (Moore 2006: 570). As will be discussed further below, prioritizing the aspect of its theological anthropology of complementarity that stresses essential differences between the sexes over the part that also stresses the essential equality of the sexes leads the Vatican to strange bedfellows and contradictions.

With respect to the Scriptures, the Vatican is in the difficult position of having simultaneously to argue that texts that imply subordination are really egalitarian – that Colossians can be read to support what Southern Baptist Russell dismisses, i.e. ‘mutual submission’ within an equal marital partnership’ (Moore 2006: 570) - and that texts like Galatians 3:28 also mean the opposite of what they seem to say. Thus, in his 2004 Letter, Ratzinger, immediately after quoting Galatians 3:28, goes on to insist:

The Apostle Paul does not say that the distinction between man and woman, which in other places is referred to the plan of God, has been erased. He means rather that in Christ the rivalry, enmity and violence which disfigured the relationship between men and women can be overcome and have been overcome. In this sense, the distinction between man and woman is reaffirmed more than ever (Ratzinger 2004 II.12).

It is hard to extract a ‘reaffirm[ation]’ of ‘distinction’ from a text asserting that there ‘is no’ differential categorization, rather ‘all are one.’ Making Ratzinger’s point is especially difficult considering that a single sentence links three pairs of categories, denying their continued existence with parallel use of the word ‘no’ and ending by saying ‘all are one.’¹² Whatever happens textually to one pair in this series happens to all. Yet Ratzinger would never suggest that Galatians merely posits an end to ‘the rivalry, enmity, and violence which disfigured the relationship between [masters and slaves]’ while ‘the distinction between [master and slave] is reaffirmed more than ever.’

In addition to its tortured textual interpretation, what is remarkable about Ratzinger’s argument in the 2004 letter is the extent of its reliance on ‘sola scriptura’, a quintessentially Protestant form of argumentation rarely found in authoritative Catholic texts, which typically supplement or even replace citation to scripture with citation to Church teaching from the Fathers, the Doctors of the Church, the prior Popes or other magisterial sources. The text of the 2004 Letter cites only once a work by a Church father.¹³ The footnotes cite to the work of only one Pope, the then reigning John Paul II, but cite him repeatedly, in the overwhelming majority of the footnotes. In addition, all citations to curial authorities are to work produced during the papacy of John Paul II, that is, extremely recently.¹⁴ This is strong evidence both for the fact that

¹² The Catholic Douay-Rheims translation quoted in text and the Latin Vulgate on which it is based translate all three pairs in perfect parallelism, but Mark Jordan has drawn attention to the fact that, while the original Greek separates the first two pairs with the disjunctive “or,” it continues on to declare there is “no male **and** female” (emphasis added). A full exploration of the possible significance of speaking of “male and female” is beyond the scope of this article, but the echo in this conjunction of the words in Matthew 19:4 and Genesis 1:27 on which John Paul II builds so much of a Theology of the Body suggests the claim that the conjunctive distinction that John Paul II stresses existed “in the beginning” has, according to Galatians 3:28 and contrary to the claim in Ratzinger’s 2004 Letter, now been overcome.

¹³ See 2004 Letter at n. 6 (citing Irenaeus’s *Adversus haereses*, for the uncontroversial point that the New Testament goes beyond the Old because ‘with Jesus Christ ‘all newness’ appears’). Additionally, one other footnote, n. 4, contains a ‘Cf’ string citation to works by three Church Fathers.

¹⁴ See e.g. 2004 Letter at n. 2 (‘On the complex question of gender, see also The Pontifical Council for the Family, Family, Marriage and ‘De facto unions’ (July 26, 2000)’).

complementarity is a very recent doctrinal innovation and for the proposition frequently advanced that the theological anthropology of complementarity is largely the work product of John Paul II, building on his philosophical and theological influences, such as the theory of personalism and the work of Dietrich von Hildebrand and Edith Stein.

I do not deny the importance of John Paul II and his sources from the first half of the twentieth century. But it is important, in my view, to consider the crucial role other modern popes have played, including both his predecessors Pius XII, John XXIII, and Paul VI, and, most importantly, his successor Benedict XVI, in his work as Pope, but also in his earlier work as the theologian Joseph Ratzinger and as the head, during John Paul II's papacy, of the CDF. Before going on to consider the influence of these other popes in shaping the doctrine of complementarity, let me say a few words about the relevant philosophical influences on John Paul II.

Again, the first central point to observe is how recent John Paul II's sources are. It is only, perhaps, in the modern era, when for the first time, according to Thomas Laqueur, 'reproductive organs went from being paradigmatic sites for displaying hierarchy ... to being the foundation of incommensurable difference' (Laqueur 1992) that equality in difference can be asserted, in particular equality in difference that goes all the way down. For the pre-modern church it would have been heresy to suggest that souls have a sex or that sex is essence not accident, but that seems just what complementarity, with its stress on ontological, psychological, and spiritual sex differences, does seem to assert. And, although the nineteenth century did hold out to feminists outside the Church some notion of the possibility of equality in separate spheres, the early modern period saw a step backwards from the largely egalitarian medieval canon law of marriage to an emphasis on the 'subjection of wife to husband' which persisted as late as Pope Pius XI's 1930 Encyclical On Christian Marriage, *Casti Connubii*.¹⁵

A second central point is that even in the twentieth century, where Sr. Allen's yet to be published third volume on the Concept of Woman situates the word 'complementarity' in the work of Dietrich von Hildebrand and Edith Stein (Allen 2006), it is noteworthy how late the term emerges as a term of art. Several things are significant about Hildebrand and Stein's writings in this regard. First, neither actually uses what has now become the standard German word 'Komplementaritaet;' instead, they each speak of 'Ergaenzung', completion (Hildebrand 1929), which is not quite the same thing. So how and when did the term of art become 'complementarity'?¹⁶ Second, Hildebrand is a convert from Protestantism and Stein a convert from orthodox Judaism. Complementarity sits much better with each of those faith traditions than with the Catholicism of a celibate male priestly hierarchy, the glorification of virginity, and sex segregated monasticism (the era of the double monasteries having ended in the high middle ages). In Protestantism, everybody should be married; in orthodox Judaism, role differentiation goes all the way down. Just as for Jews one is born rather than becoming a woman¹⁷, one is born rather than becoming a priest; it is not a vocation but an inheritance, genetically determined. More importantly, however well complementarity may work for married

¹⁵Pius XI did acknowledge that 'the degree and manner [of this subjection] may vary according to the different conditions of persons, place and time. In fact, if the husband neglect his duty, it falls to the wife to take his place in directing the family.'

¹⁶ See below for some suggestions. Even if only the word and not the concept were new, this, by Ratzinger's own account, would be a strong reason not to rely on it. In the Ratzinger Report (Ratzinger 1985, 78), he asserts, 'It's always very dangerous to change religious language. Continuity here is of great importance.'

¹⁷ Cf. Simone de Beauvoir's 'One is not born but rather becomes a woman,' (Beauvoir 1973: 301), seen by Vatican opponents of gender as a sort of reverse proof text.

life, the ideal for all Jews and all Protestants, it is a poor fit with the current structure of the Catholic Church, run by a celibate male hierarchy from which women are excluded and served by those consecrated to celibate life in single sex religious communities. This raises a number of questions, such as why parity in the magisterium (even if not in the ministerial priesthood) isn't logically entailed by complementarity and how to reconcile John Paul II's assertion that the complementarity of the sexes models the trinity with his Church's proclamation that the godhead must continue to be translated by masculine pronouns regardless of the genders of the scriptural Greek or Hebrew words (Congregation for Divine Worship 2001, art. 31).

One way of turning complementarity to feminist purposes would be to accept, at least arguendo, its premises and some of the conclusions the Vatican has recently declared follow well-nigh infallibly from them, such as the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood, and to work on seeing what can fruitfully be accomplished with or in spite of them. One could thus argue, following William of Ockham, that women should not be excluded from a general council, especially in matters of faith which concern all (Kilcullen 2015 art. 85).¹⁸ One could argue, as Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza once did, that, even if women cannot be ordained, they can be appointed as cardinals (Fiorenza 2005) a position not requiring ordination, and that in the interests of parity only women should henceforth be appointed to the College of Cardinals. One could argue, as even members of the current Church hierarchy have done, that the voices of women are required to develop a more adequate theology of 'the woman'.

The more different women and men essentially are, the more humanity is only a complete whole when the two of them are collaborating equally using their complementary attributes, and thus the more essential it becomes to include women in decision-making and teaching authority. This is an argument the Vatican has pressed since the second half of the twentieth century with respect to the collaboration of men and women in the world, but it has not applied that argument to their collaboration in the Church. It is the sort of argument used to good advantage by feminists in the nineteenth century zenith of separate spheres ideology, such as those suffragettes who, whether genuinely or strategically, claimed that precisely to the extent women had special gifts, the polity stood in great need of those gifts in public life and hence women should be able to vote and encouraged to assume public office. But the argument has thus far been of relatively little interest to practicing Catholics or Catholic theologians. Even Schuessler-Fiorenza has more recently substituted for her earlier calls for women's ordination and appointment to the Church hierarchy a categorical rejection of all hierarchy to replace what she condemns as a kyriarchal church (Fiorenza 2005).

Let me now return to the precise term 'complementarity', a Latinate word which migrates from either French or Italian into English and German. In the first half of the twentieth century, Catholic influenced Vichy French activists spoke of the 'complementary roles of man and woman' (Muel-Dreyfus 2001:192) in terms quite consistent with later Vatican pronouncements. The same sort of language occurs in a series of speeches to women's organizations made by mid-century Popes from Pius XII to Paul VI. These speeches all have a somewhat similar and by now familiar character – they acknowledge that woman's roles are expanding, as is the recognition of her equality with men; they do not condemn (indeed often encourage or at worst recognize as inevitable) her greater participation in public life, but stress nevertheless her special

¹⁸ Ockham's Magister repeatedly suggests women are part of *omnes* for purposes of the maxim of canon and later of secular law 'quod omnes tangit.' For further discussion of the uses of the maxim in making feminist arguments from the middle ages to the present, see (Case, 2014).

responsibilities for the family and urge that in working out her new role her complementary particularities be fully taken into account.

I will quote extensively from one of these speeches, which not only pre-dates any pronouncements by Carol Wojtyla/John Paul II on the subject, but sets forth far more clearly than his Theology of the Body the practical implications of complementarity for secular law and life, of the sort he first began pronouncing on at any length in his 1988 *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Dignity of Woman) and then in documents he prepared in direct anticipation of the UN Beijing Conference on Women (Pope John Paul II 1995). On October 21, 1945, Pope Pius XII gave an Address To Members of Various Catholic Women's Associations on Women's Duties in Social and Political Life (Pope Pius XII 1945) which included the following sections:

Distinctive and Complementary Qualities of The Sexes

What, then, is this God-given dignity of woman? The answer lies in human nature as God has fashioned it.... As children of God, man and woman have a dignity in which they are absolutely equal....To have vindicated and proclaimed this truth, and to have delivered woman from a slavery as degrading as it was contrary to nature, is one of the imperishable glories of the Church. But man and woman cannot maintain or perfect this equal dignity of theirs unless they respect and make use of the distinctive qualities which nature has bestowed on each sex: physical and spiritual qualities which are indestructible, and so co-ordinated that their mutual relation cannot be upset without nature itself intervening to re-establish it. These peculiar characteristics which distinguish the sexes are so obvious to everybody that nothing short of willful blindness, or a doctrinaire attitude as disastrous as it is utopian, can ignore or fail to see their importance in the structure of society.

Indeed, this co-ordination of the sexes through the characteristics peculiar to each is such as to extend its influence to every single manifestation of the social life of man. ...

Where, on the contrary, the sexes disregard the intimate and harmonious relations which God has established and willed to subsist between them, and indulge instead in a perverse individualism;... where they do not co-operate in mutual harmony to serve humanity according to the designs of God and nature... ----here the common welfare of human society, spiritual and temporal alike, is seriously compromised, and even the very Church of God trembles----not for her own existence, since she has the Divine promises----but for the greater success of her mission among men. ***

Be she married or single, woman's function is seen clearly defined in the lineaments of her sex, in its propensities and special powers. She works side by side with man, but she works in her own way and according to her natural bent. Now a woman's function, a woman's way, a woman's natural bent, is motherhood. Every woman is called to be a mother, mother in the physical sense, or mother in a sense more spiritual and more exalted, yet real none the less. To this end the Creator has fashioned the whole of woman's nature: not only her organism, but also and still more her spirit, and most of all her exquisite sensibility. This is why it is only from the standpoint of the family that the woman, if she is a true woman, can see and fully understand every problem of human life. And this is why her delicate sense of her own dignity causes her a thrill of apprehension whenever the social or political order threatens danger to her vocation as a mother, or to the welfare of the family. ***

Conditions unfavorable to the family and the dignity of woman

And in fact social and political conditions today are, unfortunately, fraught with this danger. Indeed, the sanctity of the home and therefore the dignity of woman threatens to become more and more precarious. This is your hour, Catholic women and Catholic girls. Public life needs you.*** . It is for her to work with man for the welfare of the civitas in which she enjoys a dignity equal with his, and here each sex has its part to play according to its nature, its distinctive qualities, its physical, intellectual, and moral capabilities. Both sexes have the right and the duty to work together for the good of society.... But it is clear that while man is by temperament more suited to deal with external affairs and public business, generally speaking the woman has a deeper insight for understanding the delicate problems of domestic and family life, and a surer touch in solving them----which, of course, is not to deny that some women can show great ability in every sphere of public life.

It is not so much that each sex is called to a different task; the difference is rather in their manner of judging and arriving at concrete and practical applications. Take the case of civil rights, for example; at the present time they are equal for both sexes. But just think how much more intelligently and effectively these rights will be used if men and women pool their resources in using them. The sensibility and delicacy which are characteristic of the woman may perhaps bias her judgment in the direction of her impressions, and so tend to the prejudice of wide and clear vision, cool decision, or far-sighted prudence; but on the other hand they are most valuable aids in discerning the needs, aspirations, and dangers proper to the sphere of domestic life, public assistance, and religion. ***

Why do I quote so extensively from this obscure document? One reason is to advance the possibility that to look to theologians for the origins of the theological anthropology of complementarity might be to look in the wrong place. Complementarity may have started out, not just ended up, in a sphere closer to the political than the noumenological. Another is to suggest how early in the post- World War II period the concept develops, simultaneously with the incorporation of dignity (which for Catholics remains a status based dignity) as a central feature of the development of an international human rights regime in which the equality of the sexes was included (Moyn 2015).

I could have cited similar passages from John XXIII (1961, 1960) and Paul VI (1976) as counterevidence to another hypothesis I have entertained in trying to come to terms with the development of the Vatican's simultaneous rejection of what it groups under 'gender' and embrace of what it calls complementarity. The hypothesis was that there was a moment in the immediate aftermath of Vatican II when it might have all turned out differently – when, having already embraced the equality of the sexes, in, for example, the documents of Vatican II, the Catholic Church could have avoided turning to complementarity and accepted that much of what it came to demonize as the 'gender agenda' was in fact perfectly consistent with and indeed prefigured by Christian teaching on the sexes from the Gospels on down. Its view of what sex equality entailed, in the world and in the Church, thus could and should have been not unlike that of Ruth Bader Ginsburg (whose view of gender underlay, for example, the draft of the 1995 Beijing Declaration which so upset the Vatican), allowing Catholic and liberal feminists to continue in common cause. The moment I'm thinking of is before Paul VI's proclamation of *Humanae Vitae*, *Persona Humana*, and *Inter Insigniores*, when an overwhelming majority of the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control saw no conflict between use of birth control and Catholic teaching, when a majority of the Pontifical Biblical Commission saw no scriptural obstacle to the ordination of women, and when Paul VI accepted a women's equality symbol from the hands of Betty Friedan (1998: 77-78). One sign of both the possibility and its failure is

the way the debate between complementarist theologians like Ignaz de la Potterie on the one hand and a group of female dissenters and Karl Rahner on the other played itself out in the meetings of the ill-fated Pontifical Commission On Women in Society and in the Church in the mid-1970s (Donders 2002). (Significantly, this is exactly the time that Ruth Bader Ginsburg's use of the term 'gender' and the rejection of sex stereotypes which underlay it, was becoming constitutional orthodoxy in the United States on its way to international export.)

I also cite such early papal language as counterevidence to the proposition that it is John Paul II alone to whom we owe complementarity as the new Catholic orthodoxy. One should also not underestimate Ratzinger's contribution, a) to the way in which the theological anthropology of the sexes has become what Carol Gilligan in another context called 'math problems with humans' (Gilligan 1982: 26), b) to the assembling of the component parts of what becomes for the Vatican the 'gender agenda', and c) to the shifting of emphasis away from influencing the behavior of the faithful and onto an insistence on shaping secular law. Let me therefore now to turn to Benedict XVI before concluding with Francis.

The Contribution of Benedict XVI/Joseph Ratzinger

It seems to have only been a decade after the Ratzinger Report, when he was personally presented by the American activist and later blogger Dale O'Leary with her position paper *Gender: The Deconstruction of Women, Analysis of the Gender Perspective in Preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing, China September, 1995* (later revised and published as *The Gender Agenda*) that Ratzinger cathected on the word 'gender' and sent it out into the polemic generating machinery of the Vatican. But he had already at the time of the interviews that became the Ratzinger Report put all the pieces together - radical feminism, gay rights, abortion, reproductive rights, new family forms, even transsexuality - without yet having the word 'gender' to attach them to.

Already in 1984, Ratzinger had thought it:

necessary to get to the bottom of the demand that radical feminism draws from the widespread modern culture, namely the 'trivialization' of sexual specificity that makes every role interchangeable between man and woman. . . . Detached from the bond with fecundity, sex no longer appears to be a determined characteristic, as a radical and pristine orientation of the person. Male? Female? They are questions that for some are now viewed as obsolete, senseless, if not racist. The answer of current conformism is foreseeable: 'whether one is male or female has little interest for us, we are all simply humans.' This in reality has grave consequences even if at first appears very beautiful and generous (Ratzinger 1985: 95).

By the time of his 2004 Letter, he had the word 'gender' to attach to and blame for these grave consequences, which he saw as proceeding in the first instance from feminism.

Several things are of note in the mobilization of the Vatican against what it terms 'the gender agenda'. First among them are that very few interventions against 'gender' are undertaken by the Catholic Church as a religious body attempting to influence the hearts and minds of believers; rather, whether speaking as an 'expert on humanity' as in the 2004 Letter or as a state actor as in Beijing in 1995, its emphasis is on the imperative to influence secular law and policy in line with the Vatican vision. When the Vatican does speak for a faith community in promoting complementarity and opposing the gender agenda, as at the Humanum Conference, it does so

together with members of other faith communities many of which are much less committed than it is to egalitarianism between the sexes. Just as its alliance with the Organization of the Islamic Conference at the UN in the 1990s is disturbing given many of that organization's member states' views and laws on women, so it is disturbing that the Humanum Conference was sponsored by the CDF, the Catholic Church's guarantor of doctrinal orthodoxy, and that at the time of the Colloquium the CDF, infamously, was investigating the United States Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) for alleged heresies including 'radical feminism' and 'tak[ing] a position not in agreement with the Church's teaching on human sexuality'(CDF 2012). As between the positions attributed to the LCWR and those openly espoused by, for example, the Mormon Church, the Southern Baptists, Islam and Orthodox Judaism, all of whom had representatives invited to speak at the Humanum Conference, those attributed to the LCWR are more easily reconciled with Catholic orthodoxy.

The Vatican sees, and assumes its opponents also see, a tight connection between and among all the components it incorporates under the 'gender agenda,' such as the dismantling of sex roles, the acceptance of homosexuality, the recognition of a diversity of family forms and of sexual and gender expression, and access to the new reproductive technologies, condoms, other contraceptives, and abortion—in short, most of what goes under such diverse headings as women's sexual and reproductive rights, SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity), family law reform, and the elimination of sex stereotyping. Unfortunately, however, the feminist and sexual rights advocates on the other side of the 'gender agenda' from the Vatican too rarely make common cause or even seem to see the connections between the issues to which they are committed. They also tend to misinterpret the Vatican itself as being almost exclusively obsessed with homosexuality and transsexuality even when a careful reading of the Vatican's pronouncements makes clear much broader concerns about sex and gender are at issue. For example, headlines reporting on the 2008 Christmas speech Benedict XVI made to the members of the Roman Curia tended to read along the lines of 'Pope says saving heterosexuality like saving the rainforest.'(Reuters Dec 22 2008). Speaking far more broadly, however, Benedict XVI said the Church

has a responsibility towards creation, and must also publicly assert this responsibility. In so doing, she must not only defend earth, water and air as gifts of creation belonging to all. She must also protect man from self-destruction. What is needed is something like a human ecology, correctly understood.... Rain forests deserve indeed to be protected, but no less so does man, as a creature having an innate 'message' which does not contradict our freedom, but is instead its very premise (Pope Benedict XVI 2008).

Taking seriously the notion of a 'human ecology' put at risk by the 'gender agenda' has a number of fascinating implications. First, it indicates that Benedict XVI thinks of feminists and advocates for sexual rights in much the same way as environmentalists think of logging companies: they are on the verge, if they are not stopped, of clear-cutting human nature the way loggers are the rainforest. This imagines a level of power and influence, not only on law but on lived human experience, that even the most hopeful supporters and severest critics of what Janet Halley calls 'governance feminism' (Halley 2006) have not hitherto ascribed to feminists or to SOGI activists. It also helps make sense of the Vatican's emphasis on shaping secular law: the Vatican is seeking the equivalent of an endangered species act for the traditional family.

Even more intriguing, it suggests that, in Benedict XVI's view, just as it would be possible to destroy the rainforest, it would also be possible, though similarly inadvisable and

contrary to the will of the Creator, for human beings to effect the ‘self-destruction of man himself’ by destroying what he sees as ‘the nature of the human being as man and woman.’ (Pope Benedict XVI 2008: supra 48). His argument here echoes similar arguments made in twentieth century French family law reform debates by public intellectuals with Catholic connections who invoked Lacanian psychoanalytic theories and philosophical anthropology to argue that any move to eliminate traditional sex distinctions in French family law (for example, through recognition of same-sex couples, new reproductive technologies, gay and single parent adoptions) could, by disrupting the symbolic order, ‘bring about a generalized state of social chaos and psychic distress’ (Robcis 2010), in a worst case scenario turning society and all within it psychotic.

How much, if any, of this apocalyptic vision does Pope Francis share with his predecessor? How committed is he to promoting a vision of complementarity and opposing the vision his predecessor associated with gender in the Church and in the world? As I shall conclude, his pronouncements to date, when read together, seem to indicate that Francis, while not nearly as obsessed with affirming the essential complementarity of the sexes as John Paul II or with opposing gender as Benedict XVI, shares his predecessors’ views and objectives when it comes to complementarity and gender.

Pope Francis between Choice and Echo on Complementarity

From the moment of his election to the papacy, Vatican watchers of all backgrounds and ideological stripes have been fiercely debating and frantically watching to see to what extent Pope Francis shares his predecessors’ conservative views on many matters, but particularly on those related to gender and sexuality. By now there seems little doubt that the emphasis during Francis’s papacy will be elsewhere than on opposing the gender agenda, and that, when he does turn to gender, it will by and large be in a kinder, gentler manner than that of his predecessors. Advocates for the LGBT community, for example, have taken heart from his private meetings with a Spanish transman and from his oft-quoted question, ‘If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?’ (Pope Francis 2013). But, as with his approach to the divorced and remarried and to women who have had abortions, it is important to note that Francis’s approach is less of acceptance, it is rather that of ‘accompan[iment] with mercy.’ (Synod 14, 2014: 24). As Francis himself is the first to tell us, this signals no change in fundamental doctrine, only in pastoral approach.

Similarly, advocates of what the Vatican thinks of as the gender agenda might initially take heart to hear Francis observe early on, ‘We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods,’ even more so when he described these issues, not, as his predecessor did, as part of a coherent whole ideology, but rather as a ‘disjointed multitude of doctrines.’ Yet in the very same sentence in which he urged that ‘it is not necessary to talk about these issues all the time,’ Francis acknowledged that ‘the teaching of the church, for that matter, is clear and I am a son of the church’ (Spadaro 2013). In context, what Francis again appears to be urging is a change in emphasis, not in position, and again, in the interests of what a cynic might call better salesmanship for the Church.

Pope Francis’s opening remarks to the Humanum Conference might awaken hope for change, since he took as his model for complementarity the non-sex specific notion in 1 Cor. 12 that ‘the Spirit has endowed each of us with different gifts’ and went on to stress:

When we speak of complementarity between man and woman in this context, let us not confuse that term with the simplistic idea that all the roles and relations of the two sexes are fixed in a

single, static pattern. Complementarity will take many forms as each man and woman brings his or her distinctive contributions to their marriage and to the formation of their children—his or her personal richness, personal charisma (Pope Francis 2014).

But he went on to speak, like his predecessor Benedict XVI, of ‘the crisis in the family ha[ving] produced a crisis of human ecology, for social environments, like natural environments, need protection’ (Pope Francis 2014). Like Benedict XVI, Francis sees the threat posed by what both call ‘gender theory’ in apocalyptic terms, comparing it to nuclear war, Nazism and one of the ‘Herods that destroy, that plot designs of death, that disfigure the face of man and woman, destroying creation’ (Fullam 2015). But his view of the threat is less abstract than his predecessor’s: Francis draws on concrete experience with what he calls ‘ideological colonization’ by, for example, those who tie grants for the education of the poor to the condition that ‘gender theory [be] taught’ (Pope Francis 2015a).

Like John Paul II with his Theology of the Body, but again characteristically in a more down-to-earth way, Francis has devoted a series of weekly audiences to a catechesis on the family. In them, as well, grounds for hope of change seem to be extended, only to be qualified or withdrawn. For example, Francis insisted in a general audience that ‘it is necessary that woman not only be listened to more, but that her voice carry real weight, a recognized authority in society and in the Church’ (Pope Francis 2015b). But when asked by journalists in interviews about concrete ways of giving women such recognized authority, Francis described the idea of women cardinals as a bad joke (Allen 2013) and suggested he saw no need to appoint women to head Vatican departments because ‘priests often end up under the sway of their housekeepers’ (Hooper 2014). His more serious responses to questions of female authority are no more comforting to those who see complementarity as an unnecessary limit on the equality of the sexes in public life. ‘Women in the Church must be valued not ‘clericalised’, he said in response to the bad joke about women cardinals (Tornielli 2013). But he proposes to value them largely in the abstract and largely insofar as they are different from men, saying, on the one hand:

I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution (Pope Francis 2015b: supra 59).

and on the other, ‘We have not yet understood in depth what the feminine genius can give us, what woman can give to society and also to us. Maybe women see things in a way that complements the thoughts of men. It is a path to follow with greater creativity and courage.’ (Pope Francis 2015b: supra 59).

Perhaps, however, the true risk of a step backwards lies not in being open to the removal of difference, but rather in resolutely insisting that there is such a thing as ‘the feminine genius.’ If there is indeed a path to follow through complementarity to the equality of the sexes, Pope Francis, like his predecessors, has yet to show us what it might be, let alone to lead the way along such a path.

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