

## **Integral Sex Complementarity and the Theology of Communion**

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**We are being asked to consider the way in which the Trinity as a communion of divine Persons is being reflected . . . particularly in the complement relation of woman and man.**

In this article I will offer some reflections on new discoveries in the philosophy of sex identity, relative to a trinitarian theology of communion. In order to provide a historical context for this discussion, in the first part of this article I will trace some of the arguments that have been given about sex identity in the history of philosophy and point out some of the theological views that have been expressed in Christianity in relation to these philosophies. Then, in the second part I will try to offer a defense for what I consider to be the most accurate and fertile philosophical theory of sex identity, or what I call “integral sex complementarity.” Finally, in the third part I will consider how the philosophy of integral sex complementarity coheres with recent theological discussions regarding trinitarian community.

### **I. Philosophies of sex identify**

#### **Sex unity**

Plato (c. 428–355 B.C.) was one of the first philosophers in the West to argue that there were no significant differences between men and women. He thought that both sexes were fundamentally equal in dignity and worth. Because he argued that the sexes were basically the same, I call his theory *sex unity*, or in contemporary vernacular “unisex.”<sup>1</sup> This theory usually devalues bodily differences between women and men, and Plato seemed to believe that the soul, a sexless entity, was reincarnated in different kinds of bodies, male or female, human or animal.<sup>2</sup> After the sixteenth century, the theory of sex unity was defended from a Cartesian emphasis on a common ‘sexless’ reason in all human beings rather than from a belief in reincarnation; and in the twentieth century, as a result of post-modernism,

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1. *Republic* 445–456a and *Laws* 785b.

While I recognize the limitations that this kind of typology of theories of sex identity has by disregarding nuances or qualifications of a particular author, I believe that it does help to identify certain tendencies in theories that can be helpful in tracing a more or less accurate account of theories of human identity and sexual identity in Western philosophy. For a more in-depth discussion of the application of this particular typology to interpret ancient and medieval philosopher’s theories of sex identity, see my text, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution (750 BC—1250 AD)* (Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1985).

2. See *Timaeus* 619e–620d, where he describes men who had lived cowardly or immoral lives as being reborn as women. Plato’s philosophy also had elements of sex polarity in his theory, but he is significant here for the originality of his arguments for the sex unity position.



it is defended through a deconstructionist perspective of the denial of any essence of human identity.

Theological arguments that were based on a sex unity philosophy can be found, for example, in the writings of John Scotus Erigena (800-875). He stated that God created a unisex generic man, that original sin led to a division of human life into two sexes, and that after the resurrection there will be no distinction as to sex.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sex polarity**

In contrast to sex unity, which emphasized the sameness of men and women, *sex polarity* makes the double claim that there are philosophically significant differences between men and women, and that men are by nature superior to women. This theory of sex polarity, first articulated by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), was based on an argument that the female, because of the coldness of her body, was incapable of ‘boiling up her blood’ to make fertile seed in intercourse. The female provided only the “matter” of blood and bones to conception, and therefore she was an “impotent male.” Corollary to this view was the further claim that a perfect conception occurred when the material provided by the female received the male seed to produce a male child that looked like the father. Resistance of the matter to the formative power of the seed could produce a female who consequently was described a “misbegotten male.”<sup>4</sup>

The Aristotelian foundation for a sex polarity theory made its way from Greek, through Islamic, then Jewish philosophers, until it was incorporated into Christian philosophy through the writings of St. Albert the Great (1193-1280) and St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). The philosophy of the natural inferiority of woman in relation to man provided the basis for some intriguing theological claims such as that woman, who provided only material to generation, could not be held responsible for the transmission of original sin and that the Blessed Virgin’s role in the conception of Christ was simply to provide the material of Jesus’ body.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note in passing, that since Thomistic philosophy was empirical in its method, it would change the theological consequences of various views as the natural philosophy evolved through advancement of empirical method. Consequently, it is unlikely that similar theological conclusions would be drawn today, given the contemporary refutation of the sex polarity basis for Aristotelian philosophy in the area of generation.

### **Sex complementarity**

In the history of Catholic thought, between the two extremes of sex unity and sex polarity, a third theory of sex identity arose which can be called *sex complementarity*. It was first hinted at by St. Augustine (354-430) who is better known for his sex polarity claim that a married woman “was not made in the image of God,” and for his sex unity claim following St. Paul’s theme that “In God

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3. John Scotus Erigena, *Periphyseon* (On the Division of Nature) (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1976). “In the future of life after the resurrection the nature of mankind will wholly lack sex, i.e. masculine and feminine form, since it will return to the very form made in God’s image; God’s image, moreover, is not male and female, for that division was made because of sin,” 537d 11-13.

4. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 641b 25-642a2, 728a 13-27, 729b 15-20, 737a 26-30, 739b-740a 30, 765b 10-28, and 768a 12-16.

5. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw Hill, Co., 1964), 1a, 2ae, 81, 5. “Now it is the teaching of philosophers that the active causality in generation is from the father, the mother merely providing the material. Therefore, original sin is not contracted from the mother but from the father. Accordingly if Eve and not Adam had sinned, their children would not have contracted original sin. And conversely, they would have contracted it if Adam alone and not Eve had sinned.” And *Summa Theologiae* 3a, 32, 4. “Since it was not given to the Blessed Virgin to be father of Christ but mother, the consequence is that she did not receive an active power for the conception of Christ, the Blessed Virgin did not actively effect anything in the conceiving, but ministered the matter only.” St. Thomas introduced a theory of transmutation of matter to explain how the conception occurred.



there is neither male nor female.”<sup>6</sup> However, St. Augustine reflected on the fact that some sex polarity theorists thought that since all imperfections were transformed by the resurrection, and since a woman was an ‘imperfect or deformed man,’ it would follow logically that after the resurrection of the body women would be turned into men. He rejected this view, and argued instead that to be a woman was not an imperfection. In this remark St. Augustine set the line for a Christian philosophy of sex complementarity, although he himself did not follow it to its inevitable conclusions.<sup>7</sup>

The philosophy of sex complementarity received its most complete early formulation in the work of the Benedictine Abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). In *Causa et Curae*, a typology of relationship between four kinds of men and four kinds of women was described. Hildegard’s theory drew upon a medieval “science” of elements and humors to explain the basis for the philosophical differentiation and simultaneous equality of the sexes. Hildegard may have had a personal experience of complementarity in her position as Abbess in relation to abbots, bishops, and other significant spiritual men. This experience of complementarity may have given her a grounding for her philosophy and theology of complementarity, as well as provided her with an experiential basis along with her mystical prayer for her theological exploration of the masculine and feminine dynamics of the Divine.<sup>8</sup>

It should be mentioned, however, that in spite of Hildegard’s extraordinary accomplishments in philosophy of sex identity, her own theological writings sometimes fell into what I call a limited or “fractional” complementarity.<sup>9</sup> By this I mean that she sometimes divided masculine and feminine characteristics into parts so that one sex necessarily had one aspect, and the other had the complement aspect. Edith Stein’s theory of sex identity also fell into the more limited theory of fractional complementarity at the same time as it raised the important questions about the relation between sex identity and vocation.

In the following passage we see Edith Stein struggling to describe the complementary dynamics of man’s and woman’s related identities:

I am convinced that the species humanity embraces the double species man and woman;

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6. St. Augustine, *De Genesis ad Litteram in Oeuvres* (Paris: Desclée, DeBrouwer, 1936). XI, xlii, 58, 323-325 (our translation): “Indeed in the same way women are not excluded from this grace of renewal and of the resurrection, after the image of God—although in their corporeal sex, it is figured otherwise, in the sense that it is said that man only is the image of glory of God”; and *The Trinity* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), Book XII, Chapter 7, 351. “The woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned as a helpmate, a function which pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God, just as fully and completely as when he and the woman are joined together in one.” If St. Augustine had argued that man also needed to be joined to woman in order to be in the image of God, then this passage would have been an example of sex complementarity rather than sex polarity. For the sex unity theory see: *Confessions* (Great Britain: Penguin, 1981), 352: “You created man male and female, but in your spiritual grace, they are as one. Your grace no more discriminates between them according to their sex than it draws distinction between Jew and Greek or slave and freeman”; and *The Trinity*, Book XII, chap. 7, 354. “Who is it then, that would exclude women from this fellowship, since they are with us co-heirs of grace, and since the same Apostle says in another place...There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Have they believing women, therefore, lost their bodily sex? But because they are renewed there to the image of God, where there is no sex, man is made there in the image of God, where there is no sex, namely, in the spirit of his mind.”

7. St. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* (London and Cambridge Mass.: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1966), XII, 17. “There are some who think that in the resurrection all will be men, and that women will lose their sex...For myself, I think that those others are more sensible who have no doubt that both sexes will remain in the resurrection”; and “In the resurrection, the blemishes of the body will be gone, but the nature of the body will remain. And certainly, a woman’s sex is her nature and no blemish.”

8. Hildegard of Bingen, *Causa et Curae*, in *Opera Omnia Patrologiae Latina* (Paris: J.P. Minge, 1882), vol. 197 [German transl., *Heilkunde* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1957)]. See also Sr. Prudence Allen, “Hildegard of Bingen’s Philosophy of Sex Complementarity” in *Thought*, LXIV (Sept. 1989): 231-241; and “Two Medieval Views on Woman’s Identity: Hildegard of Bingen and Thomas Aquinas” in *Studies in Religion*, vol. 16, No.1 (1987): 21-36. In the following passage an example of complementarity between the ideal or second kind of man and woman is described in terms of the “phenomenology” of the gaze. She contrasts this with the third kind of man who embodies a sex polarity stance: “With women they can have an honorable and fruitful relationship. The eyes of such men can meet squarely with those of the women, much in contrast to those other men’s eyes that were fixed on them like arrows,” 140 (trans. by El Kordi Schmidt).

9. See Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard’s Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).



that the essence of the complete human being is characterized by this duality; and that the entire structure of the essence demonstrates the specific character. There is a difference, not only in body structure and in particular physiological functions, but also in the entire corporeal life. The relationship of soul to body differs in their psychic life as well as that of the spiritual faculties to each other...The differentiation of the species as presented by philosophy corresponds to the destiny of the sexes as shown to us by theology. Man and woman are destined "to rule over the earth," that means, to know the things of this world, to delight in it, and to develop it in creative action.<sup>10</sup>

In integral sex complementarity, which I will explain more fully at the end of this essay, man and woman is each understood as a whole, and not a fractional being. However, it needs to be said that even with the limitation of their theories of fractional complementarity, Hildegard of Bingen and Edith Stein were both working towards a theory of integral sex complementarity, or the view that men and women are significantly different but neither sex is by nature superior in dignity and worth to the other. Their inability to achieve a solid philosophical basis for integral sex complementarity many have been due to the fact that the philosophy of person had not yet been adequately developed. Before that development can be more fully described, there is one final theory of sex complementarity in the history of philosophy that needs articulation.

### **Reverse sex polarity**

The fourth theory of sex identity is an inversion of traditional sex polarity; it claims that there are philosophically significant differences between the sexes, but that woman is by nature superior to man. I call this theory reverse sex polarity. It was introduced first into Western thought by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), who argued in the Christian context that woman was superior to man because she was the last in order of creation.<sup>11</sup> Lucrezia Marinelli (1571-1658) further defended this view in a text which offered hundreds of different philosophical and theological arguments for the superiority of woman over man.<sup>12</sup> However, reverse sex polarity did not have as much of an impact on the wider context of Christian thought as did the theories of sex polarity, sex unity, or sex complementarity.

In the last twenty years different forms of reverse sex polarity have been newly articulated in contemporary radical feminist literature. Some theorists refer to this as "post-Christian" thought, and for a few it offers a justification for the worship of a female deity or goddess. It is often based on a philosophical argument for a superiority of the female sex and what is called "female culture."<sup>13</sup>

At this point in our survey of four different theories of sex identity (sex unity, sex polarity, sex complementarity, and reverse sex polarity) it is important to return to the original focus of the way in which philosophers can contribute to discussions about sex identity, and vocation. By separating out the main premises of each of the different theories of sex identity a greater clarity can be gained about the concept of person underlying each theory.

For example, it is clear that most sex unity arguments take the form of devaluing the body in some way, or implying that human identity ought to ignore the sexual component, while sex polarity and

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10. Stein, *Essays on Women, The Collected Works of Edith Stein* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1987) vol. 11, 177.

11. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *Superiority of Woman Over Man* (New York: American News Company, 1873), 9-10.

12. Lucrezia Marinelli, *La Nobiltà et eccellenza della donne* (Venice: Gio. Battista Sanese, 1601), 10, 11: "The Ideas of women [in the mind of God] are nobler than those of males, as their beauty and virtue demonstrates"; and "because a woman is made of a man's rib and a man made of mud she is nobler than he, because the rib is nobler than mud." (Trans. by Fillippo Salvatore).

13. Mary Daly is the prime example for this view. See, *Gyn/ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) or *Pure Lust* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).



reverse sex polarity arguments place an opposite emphasis on bodily differentiation. In polarity everything seems to derive from one isolated aspect of male or female biological differentiation. The isolated aspect is invoked to support a superiority in one sex, and then used to devalue the other sex. In contrast to these two extreme positions, sex complementarity appears to seek a third way in which bodily factors, among other factors, play a role, but not necessarily the only role in determining one's identity and vocation.

## II. Man and woman as persons

Before the theory of sex complementarity can be explained in more detail, it is necessary to make some important philosophical distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine, and man and woman as individuals and as persons. Then it will be possible to return again to the theological question of how man and woman as described by a theory of integral sex complementarity can be understood as living their vocation to be "in the image of God."

### Male and female

In the history of philosophy we can perhaps identify four stages in the consciousness about what it means to be a person as a man or as a woman. In order to emphasize the richness of the development of the concept of personhood and its relation to sexual identity I will use an analogy from geometry in which the development of theories of sex identity is related to the movement from a single dimension point, to a two-dimensional triangle, to a three-dimensional tetrahedron, and to the interaction of three-dimensional objects in complex structures. In the first stage, a *single point* represents being either a male or a female.

From approximately 750 B.C.-1400 A.D., or from the pre-Socratics to the end of the Middle Ages, the main question that philosophers asked about sex identity was the question of what it meant to be male or female. Their answers generally focused on some aspect of the body as essential to sex identity.

In the first part of this essay, Aristotle's focus on the relation of heat and cold, and of the capacity to contribute seed to generation was given as one example of this biological differentiation of the male and female. It is interesting to think about what Aristotle or St. Thomas, who were empirically sensitive, would conclude today about male and female differentiation. Most likely they would accept the common medical practice of differentiation through the combined interaction of the three factors of chromosomes, anatomy, and hormones. That is, today it could be said that to be a *male* or to be a *female* human being in general implies a reference to a biological cluster of facts associated with an individual, and that this cluster involves reference to specifically sex-identified *hormones*, *chromosomes*, and *anatomy*.

It is also clear that in the activity of procreation itself the male and female both provide twenty-three chromosomes, so they give what could be called an equal contribution. At the same time, however, the pathways of access of the male seed and the female seed are the differentiated sperm and egg. In fact, they must be different in order for fertility and conception to occur. Therefore, from a simple reconsideration of the relation of male and female on the biological level of generation we find the two premises of sex complementarity (i.e. equality and differentiation) affirmed.

### Masculine and feminine

A second stage in the philosophy of sex identity occurred between 1400-1800 when philosophers began to consider how masculinity and femininity functioned in human identity. Certainly the subject



had been mentioned earlier in Western thought, but it was not until Renaissance Humanism that the issue was a preoccupation of philosophers in general.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of this historical period there was a rigid differentiation of masculine and feminine cultural qualities and, generally within the sex polarity framework, a view that males should be masculine and females feminine. Some traditional characteristics that were considered masculine were: to be active, to rule, to reflect, to engage in public work, and so forth; those that were considered feminine were: to be passive, to obey, to be intuitive, to engage in private work, and so forth.

However, with later insight into the cultural variability of what is considered to be masculine and feminine, as well as insight into the depths and complexities of personality, we have come to recognize that within any culture it is possible to think of a man or woman as holding a dynamic interweaving of characteristics identified as masculine and feminine within that particular culture. In this way an individual is comprised of both masculine and feminine characteristics at the same time rather than simply one or the other.

There seems to be a close connection between some characteristics identified as masculine and the male biological identity, and some similarly identified as feminine and the female biological identity. However, this connection is fluid and open to interpretation within a particular culture.<sup>15</sup> In addition it is clear that the growth and maturity of an individual within our Western culture involves a development of both masculine and feminine qualities in either a man or a woman.<sup>16</sup>

In this case, however, we are not moving to an androgyny, or a theory of identity of all human beings, because the starting point, the maleness and the femaleness, is always different for the two sexes. A combination of the three factors of male, masculine, and feminine in a male individual would always differ from the combination of the three factors of female, masculine, and feminine in a female individual.

When we return to the geometrical analogy mentioned above, if we think of being a male or a female as a single reference point, and then add to it two further points which represent the masculine and feminine characteristics within a particular culture, we could say that the two-dimensional triangle represents an advancement of understanding of sex identity. One triangle would have the vertices of male, masculine, and feminine; the other would have the vertices of female, masculine, and feminine.

When we reflect on what it means to be a male with masculine and feminine characteristics, or a female with masculine and feminine characteristics, it would seem that we find a further support for the premises of sex complementarity. The sex polarity tradition might identify discursive reason exclusively with the male, intuitive thinking exclusively with the female; while the sex unity tradition might say that there are no significant differences about the way in which a male or a female human being reasons or thinks.

In the recently published *Feminine, Free, and Faithful*, the philosopher Rhonda Chervin tries to identify specific ways in which men and women are described as complementary within Western culture. She states:

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14. Works by Boccaccio, Petrarch, Castiglione, Bembo, and Marinellian consider what is masculine and feminine as well as male and female.

15. See Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: Dell Publication, 1969) and *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell Publication, 1968).

16. In this view, I am taking a slightly different approach than that expressed by Mary Rousseau in her outstanding article entitled "Pope John Paul II's Letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women: The Call to Communio" in *Communio: International Catholic Review*, vol. 16, No.2 (Summer 1989): 223: "Men do not, cannot, have any feminine side to develop; they are masculine through and through." I believe that my theory uses 'male' for her concept of masculine and 'female' for her concept of feminine, and that we share the goal of not allowing the theory to slide into an androgyny.



...a distinction should also be made between complementarity of qualities and complementarity of roles. Quality-complementarians such as Dietrich von Hildebrand, Stern and Wojtyła (John Paul II), are primarily concerned that different traits of men and women be reinforced, whatever roles they play in life...It is my conviction that quality-complementarity contains precious truths and that role complementarity, while sometimes too rigid, is basically helpful to men and women.<sup>17</sup>

Chervin's work, while also sometimes limited within a model of fractional complementarity, nonetheless breaks valuable ground in considering the specific place of masculinity and femininity in personal development and vocation.

Within the framework of sex complementarity, I would argue that both men and women have the same capacities for intuitive thinking and reasoning, but that the data of their consciousness is sometimes different. For example, in their biological differentiation as male or female, we could say that they have a sexually differentiated experience of their body. Their social and psychological experience of being brought up as male or as female in a specific culture with its unique language, history, and expression of archetypes will also be different.

Furthermore, in their specific relation as male to their culturally identified masculine and feminine characteristics or as female to these similar masculine and feminine characteristics there is also a difference. A male who has what a culture considers to be a specific masculine or feminine characteristic is different from a female who has the same masculine or feminine characteristic. The reason is that the starting point in self-definition is maleness for the man and femaleness for the woman. So a male with a culturally identified masculine characteristic is different from a female with the same culturally identified masculine characteristic. The same difference would be found in a male or a female with the same culturally identified feminine characteristic.

This means that once again we find a situation of equality (in capacities to think and reason) and difference (in some sexually differentiated data of consciousness). A theory of sex complementarity can include both of these factors, while sex polarity excludes equality and sex unity excludes the difference.

### **Man and woman as individuals**

In a third stage of the development of a philosophy of sex identity, the significance of a human being as a *self-defining individual* was emphasized for the first time. This recognition of interiority, or the demand for an individual responsibility for self-definition, was raised by nineteenth-century existentialists such as Kierkegaard or Nietzsche in specific relation to man. De Beauvoir and others applied this view in the twentieth century to the situation of woman. Sometimes this demand placed on human beings to define their identity is characterized by the phrase that "one is not born but rather becomes a man or a woman."<sup>18</sup>

The important change here is that an individual man or woman is called upon to enter into the activ-

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17. Rhonda Chervin, *Feminine, Free, and Faithful* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 45, 50. See also Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) for a consideration of these qualities in late medieval thought.

18. Kierkegaard stated many times that the prime task was to "become an individual." See *Fear and Trembling* (Problem II) by pseudonymous Johannes De Silentio (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: Penguin, 1968) states that he only finds fragments of men, but no single individuals. In a letter to Lou Salome (August 1882) he suggests that she too can become an individual: "Lastly, my dear Lou, the old, deep, heartfelt plea: become the being you are!" in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 191. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), 301: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." It is important to note in passing that the issue of the individual was raised in medieval philosophy. See Glenn W. Olsen, "St. Augustine and the Problem of the Medieval Discovery of the Individual," *Word and Spirit* 9 (1987): 129-56. However, the issue did not become a central preoccupation of philosophers until the nineteenth century.



ity of self-definition. Previously, when considering the human being as male, female, masculine, or feminine, there was a sense in which these aspects tended to be set either by biology or culture, and the human being simply lived out a predetermined sex identity. With the emphasis upon the concept of the activity of self-definition, or of becoming individualized, the man or woman begins to take an active role in giving a meaning and direction to his or her identity. While much of the identity is still set by biology and culture, there is still a “space” in which free will, choice, and capacity to change oneself can operate.

If we return to the geometrical analogy previously introduced which involved a moving from a single dimension point, to a two-dimensional triangle, we could say that this stage in the development of a philosophy of sex identity is like moving into a three-dimensional range of the tetrahedron.<sup>19</sup> In this level of development as self-defining individual, there is an interiority as well as an exteriority. An individual makes himself or herself into a particular kind of man or a particular kind of woman, or what Pope John Paul calls the “unique and unrepeatable” dynamic of individual human identity. If the individual is a man, then he must define himself in relation to his maleness, and the masculinity and femininity he experiences within himself and in his own culture. If the individual is a woman, then she must define herself in relation to her femaleness, and to the femininity and masculinity she experiences within herself and in her own culture.

The activity of individual self-definition is dynamic and vital, and it is sexually differentiated so that it has some different parameters for a man than it does for a woman. The sex unity theory would disregard these differences, while the sex polarity theory would make them rigid. A sex complementarity theory follows the middle way by claiming that both men and women have the same capacities for self-definition. They can both observe, they can both make judgments about what ought to be done, and they can choose specific actions to perform in relation to the call to define oneself in a particularly human way as a man or as a woman. However, their contexts for this activity of self-definition are different in some respects. Therefore, we have repeated the two key aspects of equality and difference which are the central aspects of sex complementarity.

Once again we can say that a trend of sex unity theorists is to define away any sexual differentiation, while sex polarity theorists and reverse sex polarity theorists seek to hold onto and to conform to an essential difference identified as that which makes a “real” man or a “real” woman. Sex complementarity theorists, on the other hand, seek to understand the activity of defining oneself as woman or as man as including a complex interweaving or clustering of sexual as well as other characteristics into an integrated identity as a man or a woman.

### **Man and woman as persons**

From the 1930s to today there has been another distinctive stage in the Western philosophy of sex identity. In this new development, a differentiation between individual and person is discovered and affirmed. Briefly, an individual is someone who defines himself or herself away from a crowd, or the more universal mass of humanity in general. A *person*, on the other hand, actively creates the self through relationship with other persons in social and communal bonds.

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19. I am indebted to R. Buckminster Fuller, *Synergetics* (New York: Macmillan, 1982) for the insight into the analogous applications of the structure of a tetrahedron. It was during a year-long study of this work at Lonergan University College in 1987-88 that its applications to questions of sex identity became clear. I would also like to mention Bernard Lonergan's *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 132-4, which offers the potential to further develop the concept of human identity through a focus on levels of integration found at increasingly higher complexity of organism from subatomic, atomic, nuclear, biological, chemical, to the higher rational centers of organization present in fully actualized women and men. Further, Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of a Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 36, elaborates the particular qualities of self-interpretation that are present in human beings.



It is not surprising that this twentieth century “discovery of personhood” was Catholic in its inspiration and development. The French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) is generally known as the founder of the “Personalist” school of philosophy. In the following extract from *Personalism*, he introduces the fundamental distinction between an individual and a person:

...‘the person’ is sometimes opposed to ‘the individual.’ The self-reflective moment which constitutes ‘the individual’ contributes to the maintenance of the human shape. But the person is only growing insofar as he is continually purifying himself from the individual within him. He cannot do this by force of self-attention, but on the contrary by making himself *available* (Gabriel Marcel) and thereby more transparent both to himself and to others.<sup>20</sup>

Personalism has recently received an even more systematic development in Poland through the work of the philosophers at Lublin Catholic University, and specifically through the writing of Fr. Mięczyław Krapieć O.P. and Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, now Pope John Paul II. Both of these men worked to develop a new Catholic philosophy which sprang out of a renewed Thomism, existentialism, and personalism. In *The Acting Person*, Karol Wojtyła emphasizes the importance of thinking today of the call to become persons:

The ‘personalistic’ value of the human action—that is, the personal value—is a special and probably the most fundamental manifestation of the *worth* of the person himself... it is in actions that the person manifests himself... the person performing the action also *fulfills himself in it...*<sup>21</sup>

In the English-speaking world, this development has recently been called “Existential Personalism” by Fr. Andrew Woznicki, S. Ch.<sup>22</sup>

The key factor in existential personalism is that the person actively creates his or her identity in a “gift of the self to another.” This goes beyond the individual who defines the self away from and in opposition to others. In his recent Apostolic Letter, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman*, Pope John Paul II emphasizes the duty of all Christians to move towards a development of personhood:

Man—whether man or woman—is the only being among the creatures of the visible world that God the Creator “has willed for its own sake”; that creature is thus a person. Being a person means striving towards self-realization (the Council text speaks of self-discovery), which can only be achieved “through a sincere gift of self.”<sup>23</sup>

Each step is important in the full development of personhood, but the fulfillment in the Christian understanding of vocation comes through the discovery of the self through personal acts of gift of self to the other.

To return to the original geometrical analogy, we can say now that man and woman who interact as persons can be seen as analogous to the interbonding of three-dimensional tetrahedral

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20. Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), 19.

21. Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 264-5.

22. See Andrew Nicholas Woznicki, S. Ch., *The Dignity of Man as a Person: Essays on the Christian Humanism of His Holiness John Paul II* (San Francisco: Society of Christ Publications, 1987); *A Christian Humanism: Karol Wojtyła's Existential Personalism* (New Britain, Conn.: Mariel Publications, 1980); and *Existential Personalism: Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (Washington, DC 1986), vol. LX.

23. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Boston: St. Paul Books, 1988), No.7, p. 28.



figures into complex structures. In other words, the bonding together into communities comes through interpenetration of self-gift by men and women to one another. This can occur in marriages, in friendships, in church ministries, in religious communities, and so forth.

The interrelation between the development of persons and communities is emphasized by the Chairman of the Lublin Faculty of Philosophy, M. Krapiec O.P., in his text *I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*:

Common Good is also the ultimate foundation for joining together dynamized human persons in free personal societies. For community is indicated by the dynamism of the human person, whose full development is impossible without life in a community, because the perfecting of human cognition, love, and freedom would be impossible. The result of this perfecting is the constituting of a person as a “being-for-another-person,” for acts of intellectual cognition and love develop and perfect themselves in a dialogue with a “Thou” of another person. This means that a person’s life, his spiritual development and achievement of perfection as a rational being, are impossible without establishing his interior life on the level of a dialogue with the “Thou” of another person.<sup>24</sup>

With this philosophical distinction between person and individual in mind and with the help of another mathematical analogy, it is now possible to understand how *integral* sex complementarity differs from *fractional sex* complementarity. If we think of sex identity in terms of isolating certain characteristics so that a male provides one-half and a female one-half of a whole human being, or even an odd fraction like one-third and two-thirds or three-fourths and one-fourth, then the so-called complementarity between the man and woman is fractional. Both are needed to make a single whole. This was the traditional way in which the phrase “complementarity” of man and woman was used.

Fractional complementarity often left women feeling as though they had the smaller portion of the whole. For example, they were identified with a lower practical intuition while men were identified with a higher theoretical reflection along with the highest creative intuition of genius in the arts and sciences. When this kind of differentiation happened, fractional complementarity really hid a more pervasive sex polarity. Sometimes this could be seen in discussions about vocation in the Church, or complementary ministries.

If, on the other hand, we can move into a comprehensive understanding of what integral sex complementarity may mean, then perhaps some new insights into vocation in the Church can occur. If man and woman are considered whole already as self-defining individuals and self-giving persons, then they are more like integers than like fractions. Furthermore, the interaction of two whole beings leads to a more fertile result than simply one whole composed of two fractional beings. In fact, in integral sex complementarity, the bonding of two persons creates what can be called a *synergetic* effect, or one plus one adds up to more than two. In marriage the addition of one plus one generates three in the procreation of children. In friendship, community, and complement ministries, interbonding of men and women leads to an analogous synergetic effect.

We can now see that in fractional complementarity the whole is simply the sum of the parts. It is a sterile form of relatedness. On the other hand, integral complementarity is always synergetic, so that the whole is always more than the sum of the parts. Therefore, integral sex complementarity

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24. Mieczyslaw Krapiec O.P., *I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology: Abridged Edition* (New Britain, Conn.: Mariel Publications, 1985), 163-4. See also the unabridged version of this same text (1983), 330-333.



can be a model of fertility and dynamism with tremendous potential for providing a philosophical basis for fruitful Christian community.

### III. Complementarity and the Trinity

We are now at the point where we can return to the original goal of this article. If we understand better what it is to be a human person, a man and a woman who are realizing their potential for personhood, we will be able to comprehend better the Christian God as a Trinity of three persons. Philosophy can clarify the interbonding of human persons while theology can clarify insights into the three Divine Persons or the interdynamics of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For example, today we believe through a common faith elaborated in the Church through the centuries, that the Divine Persons are equal as divine, and yet each one is different in relation to the other. Each Person of the Blessed Trinity has free will, intelligence, and differentiated identity, for we often speak of the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Counselor or Advocate, and so forth. We differentiate these Persons in our reflections and our prayers in our attempts to understand and to love this Triune God.

With some further reflection it is obvious that this kind of thinking about the Trinity involves the two key concepts of equality and differentiation, or precisely the two components in integral complementarity. The divine persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are above all in a relation of integral complementarity.

#### Incarnation and sex identity

It is also important to reflect on the philosophical aspects of the dogma of the Incarnation in so far as it holds to the tenet of faith that Christ is *fully God and fully man*. He is one Person with two natures. Given the philosophical elaboration of personhood above it seems as though an understanding of Christ's human nature as man would demand an integration of his maleness, masculinity and femininity, his self-definition as individual man, and his gift of self to others as person. Each one of these factors plays an important role in the whole, so to eliminate or devalue his maleness, his relation to his cultural differentiations of masculinity or femininity, his struggle to define his identity as man, and his extraordinary nuptial gift as Person-Savior to his Bride, the Church, would be to devalue his Incarnation and to devalue his identity as *fully man*.

Those theologians who take a sex unity approach will choose to overlook the real and significant differentiation of man and woman, as based in a unique relationship to maleness, femaleness, masculinity, and femininity. They will want to get rid of differences. They may even argue that it is an irrelevant fact of history that Jesus was incarnated as male rather than female.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, those theologians who follow the philosophy of sex polarity will want to emphasize the differences and to rigidly claim one factor as *the* crucial factor for the superiority of man over woman or vice versa in reverse sex polarity. They may argue that the Savior could never be female because of an imperfection in the female sex, or they could argue in a "feminist post-Christian" mode that the Savior of the world infected by 'a sin of patriarchy' would have to be female because of an imperfection in the male sex.

The challenge for supporters of integral sex complementarity is to reject these forms of devaluation, one of sexuality itself, and the other of one sex or the other. Instead, sex complementarity

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25. See the recent debate in *The Tablet* about the maleness of Jesus. Charles Davis, "Is the Maleness of Jesus a Sacred Sign?" No.243 (1989) 190-192, and letters: February 18, 1989, March 25, 1989, and April 8, 1989.



theorists must choose to affirm the simultaneous equality and difference of men and women, and to avoid the extremes of a sex unity which disregards difference, or a sex polarity which disregards equality. In making these choices, a Christian begins to approach in a new way the intersection of philosophy and theology in a reflection on what it means to be “created in the image of God.”

### **Creation and sex identity**

In the first chapter of the Book of *Genesis*, there is the intriguing passage that describes God carrying on an internal conversation: “Let us make man in our own image and likeness.” Then when this communal likeness is revealed, it manifests itself as the creation of male and female, or man and woman. It is perhaps only today, in the twentieth century, when we have come to a fuller understanding of what community, personhood, and sexuality is, that we can begin to understand the radical and undeniable connection between sex identity and the image of the Trinitarian God. In fact Edith Stein argued, a few years before her death in 1942, that “the image of God is established as a duty, vocation or destiny of mankind—i.e., of man and woman.”<sup>26</sup> Her analysis challenged all Christians to accept as a significant aspect of their vocation the perfection of their identity as a man or as a woman.

In medieval times, when there was a great concern to establish Christianity as a monotheism in the context of a pagan polytheistic Greek and Roman culture, it is not surprising that St. Augustine and even later St. Thomas emphasized the singleness of God, and of the reflection of the image of God the Father primarily in the male human being. *This* was the reason why St. Augustine argued that woman alone could not reflect the image of God, while her husband could; and it was also why St. Thomas qualified the view somewhat to say that woman by herself does reflect the image of God, but that she reflects it less perfectly than does man.

In the twentieth century, however, there has been such a wide-ranging change of consciousness about woman and man that the traditional interpretation of Augustinian and Thomistic views which imply that a man more perfectly reflects the image of God than a woman seems very inadequate. It is in the light of these contemporary understandings that the recent writings of Pope John Paul II are so illuminating, for he states explicitly that woman and man equally reflect the image of God. Therefore, the present Holy Father is pointing the way to a profoundly new understanding within the traditional teachings of the Church of the way in which men and women reflect the image of God.

In his recent Homilies on *Genesis*, Pope John Paul II emphasizes that:

... man became the image and likeness of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the model, *not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion*. He is, in fact right “from the beginning” not only an image in which there is reflected the solitude of a Person who rules the world, but also and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons.<sup>27</sup>

It is hard to overestimate the significance of this shift in emphasis that Pope John Paul II is bringing to the Church’s understanding of man and woman as persons. For the first time we are being asked to consider the way in which the Trinity as a communion of divine Persons is being reflected in our communities of human persons and particularly in the complement relation of woman and man.

This particular call of man and woman to reflect the image of God in the interdynamic of their re-

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26. Edith Stein, “Problems of Women’s Education,” *Essays on Women*, 174.

27. Pope John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981), 73-4.



lationship is beautifully expressed by Pope John Paul II in his recent Apostolic Letter *On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman*:

The fact that man “created as man and woman” is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a “unity of the two” in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to mention again how new this expression of imaging of the Trinity is in the Church. In the past, St. Augustine thought about the way in which the Trinity was reflected in the memory, understanding, and will of a single human being, but he did not bring forth a theory of the communion of equal and different human persons which included women as well as men who fully reflected the image of God. Therefore, today it is incumbent upon us to enter into profound reflection on the question of how our interaction with others as woman and as man in building up different communions of persons so particularly reflects the image of our God who is a Communion of Persons.<sup>29</sup>

In a 1983 pastoral letter, Cardinal Carter of Toronto attempted to elaborate further this theology of communion when he wrote:

The trinitarian and marital structure of reality, of humanity, demands that we dismiss those paradigms of social relation drawn from the monadic, anti-trinitarian rationale ... When we focus upon the Eucharistic presence of Christ in the Church, it is evident that the marital relation which that presence establishes at the centre of the Church’s worship of the Trinity is at the same time the utterly radical structure of the human community.<sup>30</sup>

It seems that the nuptial bond which the communion of man-person with woman-person establishes is the key to this marital structure of reality which was created by God from the beginning. This nuptial bond is not simply a symbol, it is reality itself. It is the revelation of the call of all human creation into a full personal gift of self to the other. A philosophy of integral sex complementarity, then, can provide a theoretical basis for the theology of communion among fundamentally equal but different persons.\*

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28. Pope John Paul II, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman*, No.7, p. 26.

29. For elaboration of practical examples of models for communities of persons, see Jean Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 142, for a reflection on the spiritual fecundity in the trinitarian dynamic of communities of mentally handicapped; and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1977), 251-387 for reflections on the trinitarian interdynamic of members of the Priestly, Lay, and Evangelical states of life.

30. Cardinal Gerald Emmett Carter, “Do This in Memory of Me”: A Pastoral Letter upon the Sacrament of Priestly Orders (Toronto: December 8, 1983), 25-26.

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## STRUCTURE OF THEORIES OF GENDER IDENTITY

Based on the work of Sr. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., Ph.D.

| Theory                                 | Equal Dignity of Man and Woman               | Significant Differentiation of Man and Woman |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Gender Unity (unisex and unigender) | Yes  | No   |
| 2a. Traditional Gender Polarity        | No<br>Man <i>per se</i><br>superior to woman | Yes  |
| 2b. Reverse Gender Polarity            | No<br>Woman <i>per se</i><br>superior to man | Yes  |
| 3a. Fractional Gender Complementarity  | Yes  | Yes<br>Complementary as parts                |
| 3b. Integral Gender Complementarity    | Yes  | Yes<br>Complementary as wholes               |
| 4. Gender Neutrality                   | Neutral                                      | Neutral                                      |

