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# In Search of the Masculine Genius

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## The Contribution of Walter J. Ong

### *1. Introduction*

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING CHAPTER EIGHT of *Amoris Laetitia* and the question of divorced and civilly remarried Catholics' reception of communion has unfortunately minimized attention to other aspects of Pope Francis's 2016 post-synodal apostolic exhortation. Among the most overlooked is Francis's consistent defense of sexual difference. For instance, quoting the synod fathers, the Holy Father boldly warns against "an ideology of gender that 'denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family.'" In the same paragraph, he rejects "legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female." While cautioning against oversimplified "rigidity" in gender roles, Francis argues that children benefit most when they have the "well-defined presence" of both "female and male" figures acting as mother and father in their lives.<sup>2</sup> Finally, he advocates for a sex education that helps young people accept their own bodies as they were created, for "thinking that we enjoy absolute power over

our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. . . . An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self-awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves. . . . Sex education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension ‘to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it.’”<sup>3</sup> In an age marked by the questions still posed by feminism as well as by new questions emerging from the LGBT movement, Francis’s defense of the positive significance of embodied sexual difference is courageous and timely and should be recognized as such.

If the created body is a gift, however, and if personal identity and encounter cannot be separated from that gift, it is necessary to reflect more deeply not only on the reality of sexual difference as a given component of the created order, but also on the particular significance of being either male or female. Only then can we succeed in embodying the “well-defined” figures of mother and father as Francis rightfully encourages us to do.

Prior to Francis, recent magisterial teaching had given much more attention to the meaning of femaleness and femininity than it had to maleness and masculinity. For example, in 1988, John Paul II authored *Mulieris Dignitatem*, an apostolic letter “on the dignity and vocation of women.” There, and elsewhere, he frequently referred to what he called the “feminine genius.”<sup>4</sup> In 2004, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), then headed by Joseph Ratzinger, issued a “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World,” which articulated a synthetic profile of the “feminine genius.”<sup>5</sup> Woman, the letter said, has a particular “capacity for the other,” which is linked to her “physical capacity to give life” that “structures the female personality in a profound way.”<sup>6</sup> This “capacity for the other,” typically but not exclusively fulfilled in motherhood, is accompanied by related gifts such as quicker maturation; “a sense of the seriousness of life and of its responsibilities; a sense and a respect for what is concrete;”

an opposition to “abstractions which are so often fatal for the existence of individuals and society;” and “singular capacity to persevere in adversity, to keep life going even in extreme situations, to hold tenaciously to the future, and finally to remember with tears the value of every human life.”<sup>7</sup> In a more explicitly theological reflection, the letter noted that because the Church is mystically identified with Mary, women are able to uniquely signify “the true face of the Church, spouse of Christ and mother of believers.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, women are able to live Mary’s “dispositions of listening, welcoming, humility, fruitfulness, praise and waiting” with “particular intensity and naturalness.”<sup>9</sup>

Although there were hints, such as a recognition of the association of masculinity with Christ the bridegroom and “suffering servant,” no real profile of a “masculine genius” was provided, either in the CDF’s letter, or in John Paul’s vast magisterial corpus, to correspond to the feminine one.<sup>10</sup> The result was a certain imbalance. For example, the CDF broadly defined femininity as “the fundamental human capacity to live for the other and because of the other.”<sup>11</sup> Claiming feminine values as “above all human values,” the letter also observed that “women are more immediately attuned to these values” and therefore are “the privileged sign of such values.”<sup>12</sup> In its conclusion, the letter said that without womanly influence, “humanity would be closed in self-sufficiency, dreams of power and the drama of violence.”<sup>13</sup> The letter offered no corresponding positive definition of masculinity or celebration of masculine values.

For his part, Francis refers positively to the notion of the “feminine genius” and repeats some of John Paul’s teaching on the matter.<sup>14</sup> However, he commendably devotes almost equal space to the importance of men, especially in family life. While Francis does not articulate anything approaching a full profile of a “masculine genius,” and while he presents most of his observations within the context of a pastoral teaching on family dynamics (rather than being explicitly theological), he does provide a few significant points of reflection on the meaning of masculinity. For example, while he strongly rejects

male chauvinism, he acknowledges the important role men play as protectors and providers in families.<sup>15</sup> He celebrates the father's position as a guide who "helps the child to perceive the limits of life, to be open to the challenges of the wider world, and to see the need for hard work and strenuous effort."<sup>16</sup> Finally, recognizing the special authority of fathers, he presents their frequent absence from their children's lives as a cause of developmental difficulties and familial breakdown.<sup>17</sup>

These threads from *Amoris Laetitia* are a welcome contribution to the development of a Catholic understanding of maleness and masculinity. Given the late-twentieth-century urgent pastoral need to respond to the questions and challenges of feminism, the lacuna in earlier magisterial teaching regarding masculinity is understandable. Today, however, men are increasingly the ones in a crisis of self-understanding.

The remainder of this article contains a constructive attempt to develop further a profile of the masculine genius that might supplement the teaching of Francis and thus support a balance to the more complete articulation of the feminine genius heretofore provided by the magisterium. Drawing primarily from the work of Walter J. Ong, whose presentation is corroborated and buttressed here with other studies, this article will show that the masculine genius includes a set of gifts that complement those of women, both in the natural order and in the order of redemption.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. *The natural order*

In 1979, Jesuit priest and polymath Walter Ong delivered a lecture series at Cornell University on evolution and culture that he subsequently collected and expanded in his 1981 book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality and Consciousness*. In this text, which weaves together animal studies, developmental psychology, and cultural reflections into a synthesis Ong calls noobiology, or "the study of the biological setting of mental activity," the author provides a convincing portrait

of maleness and masculinity that continues to hold up well decades later.<sup>19</sup> Ong reveals masculinity in the natural order as characterized by expendability, agonistic differentiation, and exteriority. These traits can be seen as complementary to feminine traits recognized by both Ong and the magisterium: durability, receptive identification, and interiority.

### 2.1 EXPENDABILITY

The CDF's letter identified the "capacity to give life," namely, motherhood, as being profoundly significant for female personhood. Maternity, or the capacity for maternity, makes a woman gifted for, among other things, perseverance "even in desperate situations."<sup>20</sup> It is woman's unique charge "to keep life going," "hold tenaciously to the future," and "remember with tears the value of every human life."<sup>21</sup>

Ong refers to this persevering trait of women as "stability," "durability," and "eternality," and he sees a biological/evolutionary reason for it.<sup>22</sup> Females are the necessary sex—in many ways more necessary than males. There are many species of insects, lizards, fish, and amphibians, for instance, that reproduce parthenogenetically, that is without males.<sup>23</sup> In other species, males are killed during copulation, disappear soon afterwards without taking part in the raising of offspring, or never mate at all (whereas almost all females do). Females, in contrast to males, must hatch or carry their young, and in the case of mammals, remain with their young for a long period to nurse them. Even among species in which males play a larger role in tending to offspring, the "mother is a reservoir for the species in a way that the father is not."<sup>24</sup> Almost universally, it is more vital to the species that females live.

Corresponding to feminine durability is masculine expendability. Males, says Ong, are "the expendable sex."<sup>25</sup> Ong notes that among almost all vertebrate species, including humans, males generally hold the responsibility of fighting off predators. For this reason, they are typically "larger and often equipped with special weapons, such as tusks, and thus are more effective."<sup>26</sup> However, Ong notes, "their

strength is a by-product of their uselessness.”<sup>27</sup> Because females are more necessary for the continuing care of young, “evolutionary selection makes it advantageous that males rather than females develop the size, strength, and aggressiveness that successful fighting demands.”<sup>28</sup> After all, “fighters are the individuals most likely to be killed, and a species can more easily survive the loss of males than the loss of females. A colony of one surviving male and twenty females can in most species reproduce itself with a proficiency that cannot be matched by a colony of one surviving female and twenty males.”<sup>29</sup> In sum, if nature prefers males to be the physically stronger and more aggressive sex, it is because males are more likely to be in harm’s way.

Ong observes the phenomenon of masculine expendability in nature and culture. He points out that even among invertebrates, males often have the more precarious tasks in order to preserve females for the continuation of the species. Male dung beetles, for instance, “regularly do the work at the surface of dung piles and outside of their burrows and thus are eaten in fantastic numbers by predators while the females work safely within the burrow under cover.”<sup>30</sup> Agrarian life evidences the expendability of the male as well. In cultures that “raise domestic animals for consumption, most of the meat consumed, mammalian or avian, is the meat of young males, often castrated young males.”<sup>31</sup> Females are too necessary for continuing the stock lines to be slaughtered. Finally, among humans, it was only recently that women began to go to war. Ong observes: “A man must be willing to die for his country or for other causes. Of course, so must a woman, but somehow there is less point in a woman’s being willing to do so. Others need her too much to spare her.”<sup>32</sup>

Ong’s claims are supported by the more recent work of sociobiologist Helen Fisher and research psychiatrist Louann Brizendine. Both note how the human male is physiologically structured for combat and other high-risk endeavors. According to Fisher, “men are built to fight—physically and emotionally.”<sup>33</sup> She explains that, compared to human females, males have less monoamine oxidase (MAO), an enzyme that serves as a physiological calming agent that inhibits risk-

taking, and seven times more testosterone, the hormone that activates aggression.<sup>34</sup> Brizendine adds that the male brain has a larger dorsal premammillary nucleus (DPN) than does the female brain. This part of the brain houses instincts for territorial protection.<sup>35</sup> Also larger in the male is the amygdala, which, when catalyzed by testosterone, “triggers protective aggression” and drives fighting.<sup>36</sup> Finally, males have a smaller anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) where anxiety about negative consequences is processed. A smaller ACC and higher levels of testosterone make males less responsive to fear, and thus more ready to take risks with their bodies and lives.<sup>37</sup> Sociological data reveals that male physiology manifests in behavior: males are, on average, physically aggressive “*twenty times* more often” than females.<sup>38</sup>

Fisher reports that deep cultural biases against involving women in war and other high-risk endeavors are almost universal. According to Fisher, “a survey of sixty-seven societies—ranging from traditional cultures to industrial democracies—found that fifty-eight excluded women from war entirely. In the remaining nine, women played much smaller supporting roles. And most of them went home or back to business when peace was achieved.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, even in the societies with the most educational and economic equality of opportunity, men continue to gravitate toward and women continue to turn away from the most “risky jobs with the worst work environments and most physical demands, such as deep-sea fishing, construction work, and policing;” in fact, “some 90% of those who die on the job are men.”<sup>40</sup>

Pope Francis highlighted the special role of men as protectors. The work of Ong, Fisher, and Brizendine supports the fittingness of males for this role. If females are uniquely and naturally gifted for perseverance and survival, and if it is their charge to look to the future and remember the fallen, it may be said that males are primarily charged with and equipped for putting their lives on the line for the sake of others.<sup>41</sup> It is for this reason that males have a stronger orientation toward and penchant for combat and other high-risk endeavors.

## 2.2 AGONISTIC DIFFERENTIATION

The CDF's letter attributed to women a particular "capacity for the other."<sup>42</sup> This aspect of the feminine genius involves receptivity and attentiveness to other persons, an ability to identify with them, and a proclivity for nurturing them toward growth.<sup>43</sup> In all likelihood, this is what develops in the female "a sense and respect for what is concrete," an openness to the environment as it comes to her and an opposition to "abstractions," the removals of things and persons from their relational context, which, the CDF says, "are so often fatal for the existence of individuals and society."<sup>44</sup>

Ong thinks that feminine openness toward the other, an instinctually positive disposition to the environment as a whole, is contrasted by a masculine adversative stance toward the world. The primary feminine drive is to "incorporate, to harbor, to keep" whatever presents itself, "for environment is feminine, and women typically find they can rely on it as it comes to them."<sup>45</sup> The primary "masculine drive," in contrast, "is to strike outward . . . to change things, to alter environment," because the male finds it in some ways always a threat.<sup>46</sup> Along these lines, Ong sees great truth in the pagan symbols of the two sexes: "The received symbol for woman, Venus's mirror . . . signifies . . . gazing at oneself as projected into the outside world or environment and reflected back into the self from there whole."<sup>47</sup> Mars's spear, on the other hand, points to the instinctively adversative stance males take toward the environment; it "signifies conflict, change, stress, dissection, division."<sup>48</sup>

According to Ong, there are two developmental explanations for the difference between the sexes and their dispositions toward the environment. First, the female and male embryos have different experiences in the womb. Both are totally dependent on the mother, and both derive from her the basic essentials of survival. However, where the female embryo finds the mother's feminine hormones hospitable for the physiological development of her particular sex, the male embryo, as tiny as it is, actually has to counter the feminine hormones of the mother by developing his own testosterone in sufficient amounts if it is to achieve masculinity. Ong writes:

The formation of the female genital tract “occurs essentially without hormonal differentiation,” [from the mother] whereas the orderly development of male anatomical characteristics, including the modification in males of the hypothalamic region of the brain, which controls the function of the pituitary gland, depends on the excretion of androgens by the male embryo and fetus. The male mammalian organism must from the start react against its environment. Thus masculinity has a certain resistance to being nurtured: for a male, being nurtured has special dangers.<sup>49</sup>

Ong concludes that “at its biological and historical source, the male’s vocation is not acceptance but change”; masculinity requires “differentiation” from the maternal environment.<sup>50</sup>

Second, not only in the womb, but also in early childhood, males are uniquely challenged to resist and differentiate from the environment while still depending on it in order to consolidate their gender identity. As infants and toddlers, males, like females, continue to depend in a particular way upon their mothers and are linked symbiotically with them. When females finally differentiate from their mothers, they do not have to also appropriate a different gender identity. Boys do. This presents a particular obstacle.

Contrary to “Freud’s position that masculinity is the natural state” of which femininity is a modification, the male child has a “task in developing his gender identity that does not burden” the female . . . The young human male is very feminine in significant ways, and necessarily so, because of his earliest maternal environment. After initial identification with the feminine, the boy must grow away from “the feminine identification that resulted from his first encounter with his mother’s female body and feminine qualities.”<sup>51</sup>

Ong concludes that masculine and feminine dispositions toward the world are rooted in these early experiences of womb and home. Females do not have to resist their environment as much in order to achieve their identity. They do not have to push against the world the

way males do, because their first experience of the world is one of shared sexual identity. Males are less inherently secure in their environment. This “insecurity has a rather obvious psychological source. . . . The human male is beset with the psychological as well as physical problem of proving his masculinity, which means in effect proving he is not female.”<sup>52</sup> Hence, he takes an adversative stance, so that he will not be absorbed into the feminine womb, the feminine home, and subsequently, the feminine world.

The masculine pattern of relating to the world, in contrast to feminine receptive identification, can be characterized as agonistic differentiation. As children, boys “must set themselves off from a backdrop of femininity.”<sup>53</sup> They accomplish this, says Ong, by “scorning feminine sources of comfort and safety,” and by “doing things they hope their mothers and sisters cannot do.”<sup>54</sup> To claim their masculinity, boys need to challenge the world. They “must discover or invent risks.”<sup>55</sup> By taking on challenges, the boy can “‘prove himself a man,’ differentiate himself from this given ambience in which he finds himself.”<sup>56</sup>

In her book, *The Male Brain*, Brizendine confirms Ong’s view that males, particularly in boyhood, are strongly driven to differentiate from femininity. According to Brizendine, by the time a male child is six months old, he is already looking at his mother’s face less often than a female child does, and “by the time he’s twelve months old, he’s built up an immunity to her expressions and can easily ignore them. For girls, the opposite happens.”<sup>57</sup> They become more, not less, sensitive to their mother’s facial communication. As toddlers, where girls show flexibility in their toy selections and willingness to associate with “boy” things and activities, boys tend to avoid “girl” toys and activities they consider feminine. Brizendine reports:

By the time a boy is just three and a half, the greatest insult is being called a girl. Boys tease and reject other boys who like girls’ games and toys. And after the age of four, if a boy plays with girls, the other boys soon reject him. Studies show

that beginning in the toddler years, boys develop a shared understanding about which toys, games, and activities are “not male” and must therefore be avoided. Boys applaud their male playmates for male-typical behavior while they condemn everything else as “girly.”<sup>58</sup>

From the onset of puberty, males typically and enthusiastically turn toward females as potential mates. Nonetheless, they carry a marked concern for differentiation from femininity throughout their lives. Ong observes that while women readily adopt styles of dress based on men’s apparel, men are much more wary of adapting feminine clothes. Additionally, while women often demonstrate enthusiasm for joining male circles, men show very little interest in joining exclusively female social clubs and civic associations. Ong also points out that across cultures, girls are often given names that derive from masculine names, yet it is very rare for boys to be given names that derive from female names.<sup>59</sup> All this, says Ong, reflects males’ desire to differentiate from the feminine world around them.

Although males are concerned to distinguish themselves, especially in early childhood, from females, they ultimately accomplish their differentiation (when it is healthy) by way of contest with other males, not with females. Males seek competition with other males exclusively because if a boy contests with a female and wins, he has shown only that he is the strongest of females and has not really left their world. If he loses, says Ong, “he is back where he started. His worst fears about himself are realized, and his ego, unless monumentally sturdy, is likely to be demolished.”<sup>60</sup> Instead, the boy must compete with other males in “ritual combat” that can take physical, intellectual, and aesthetic forms.<sup>61</sup> By challenging other males in contests, the male becomes part of the male world. If he wins victories in that world, his adequacy as a male is proved all the more.

The masculine adversative stance helps explain the way males typically relate to one another. A male cannot simply enter the company of other males, for this would pose the danger of a different kind of

absorption. Rather, he must compete with them in benevolent contests. In doing so, he manages simultaneously to achieve acceptance as a male (identification with other males), and push back against absorption. Even when males are not engaged in formal competition, their relations reflect this simultaneous association and distancing. "The bonding pattern in male groups is well known . . . It includes banter, 'ribbing,' constant psychological pushing, shoving, swatting. . . . Thus each assures himself that everybody is a friend though at the same time everybody is on his own and keeping everybody else at arm's length."<sup>62</sup> Ong describes male groups as "associations of loners. The male values a companion whom he can stand up against and who can stand up against him: each receives assurance from the other's decently assertive stance, for it reminds him of his own needs and his own resources."<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, "the male craves freedom, and for many males the symbolic independence of all environment which one establishes by setting up as a loner, with occasional participation in a bonded gang of loners, is the ultimate accomplishment of happiness."<sup>64</sup> Here lies the explanation for the appeal of the life of cowboys, merchant marines, and professional soldiers to the male psyche.

Evidently, the feminine genius for receptive identification toward the other has a correspondence in a masculine genius for agonistic differentiation from the other. It may be difficult to see how this is an equivalent gift; indeed, male agonism, when it has not been friendly, has contributed to many social ills, such as sexism, crime, war, and domestic violence.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, agonistic competition, primarily between males, has been the fuel behind innumerable cultural accomplishments. In Western philosophical discourse, for example, truth has almost always been asserted by way of dialectical opposition against the errors of others. In theology, it is well accepted that antagonism toward heresies catalyzes the formulation of orthodoxy. In science, countless innovations and achievements, such as the discovery of DNA and the placement of a man on the moon, were speeded by competition.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, agonistic differentiation structures the male's cog-

nitive and emotional approaches, giving him a gift for making distinctions and maintaining boundaries. According to Ong, whereas females tend to process the environment holistically, males tend to separate fields and analyze them.<sup>67</sup> This is confirmed by the research of Helen Fisher, who notes that males are particularly apt at “tuning out extraneous stimuli”; they see things “in distinct parts, such as facts, items, chores, units.”<sup>68</sup> This is perhaps why males typically score much higher in tests of spatial intelligence. They are more capable of recognizing three dimensionality and following moving things across a backdrop.<sup>69</sup> The same aptitude for differentiation appears in males’ emotional processing. According to Brizendine, males experience a greater influence from the temporal parietal junction (TPJ) part of the brain that “keeps a firm boundary between emotions of the ‘self’ and the ‘other.’”<sup>70</sup> Women have a larger and more active mirror-neuron system (MNS). The MNS is the brain’s “emotional empathy center.” It “gets in sync with others’ emotions by reading facial expressions and interpreting tone of voice and other nonverbal emotional cues” and allows one to feel what the other feels.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, male preference for the TPJ “prevents men’s thoughts from being *infected* by other people’s emotions, which strengthens their ability to cognitively and analytically find a solution.”<sup>72</sup> Although the CDF rightly celebrates the feminine genius for its suspicion of abstractions—in part the removal of things and persons from their relational contexts—it may overlook the masculine genius for distinctions and emotional differentiation that are necessary in certain situations, such as when one has to articulate an objective truth that might cause pain to the hearer, or when one must die or kill for a cause. Scientific studies thus support the fittingness of the male for functions of protection and boundary setting.

### 2.3 EXTERIORITY

In its letter, the CDF warned against the “human attempt to be freed from one’s biological conditioning,” as if “all persons can and ought to constitute themselves as they like, since they are free from every

predetermination linked to their essential constitution.<sup>73</sup> It advocated instead the recognition of a deep correspondence between one's physical sex and one's "psychological and spiritual" makeup; accordingly, it relates feminine gifts to biological maternity.<sup>74</sup> As John Paul puts it, "the body expresses the person."<sup>75</sup>

Male and female bodies, explains Ong, correspond with and contribute to the way each particular sex relates to its own self and to the world. Female primary sexual organs, those parts that are most distinctive and central to differentiated identity, are largely internal, and this reflects, says Ong, a gift the female has for interiority. According to Ong, woman will look within herself to find herself, and ultimately, can find there a deep security about herself. "By contrast to man, woman is interiority, self-possession . . . the virgin is permanently a symbol and realization of this interiority and self-possession, and of its tremendous power: the inviolate and secret interior, self-possessed, which the virgin knows and draws strength from in full freedom."<sup>76</sup> Woman's interior centering is not limited to her relationship with herself, however: "others relate to her interiorly—her lovers, her children."<sup>77</sup> She is able to hold them within herself as part of herself and they benefit from this. "Sharing one's own interior body space with another to communicate assurance and strength is of course a feminine prerogative, of which the paradigmatic examples are found in human sexual intercourse and pregnancy. Anatomically males are not fitted for this."<sup>78</sup>

Males, on the other hand, find the meaning of their own sexual difference outside themselves. Concretely, in a fully developed male, "the testes have moved outside the body cavity, to be somewhat external to himself."<sup>79</sup> These testes exist at a temperature that is different from the rest of the body, a fact that only "further advertises their differentiation from the rest of the organism and their relative externality."<sup>80</sup> *Testis* means witness, and the "witnesses," it may be said, to male sexual difference are outside himself.<sup>81</sup> Reproduction is also an exterior phenomenon for males. The male enters a world outside himself and creates outside himself, thus his children begin at a dis-

tance from himself.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, just as a male finds the physical witnesses (testes) of his masculinity on the outside of his body, he must trust the testimony of the female (witness) to know that the children are his. Meanwhile, the proof of her maternity is entirely internal.<sup>83</sup> If the woman is physically and relationally interior-centered, the male is physically and relationally exterior-centered. He “finds his masculinity in some way outside himself.”<sup>84</sup>

Masculine exteriority means certain disadvantages for the man. “Being human means living from interiority,” and males, thinks Ong, do not come as easily to it.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, if they are to mature, men must generally learn things, such as how to receive another person emotionally into themselves, from the example of females.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, because the male sees masculinity as “something to be won, achieved” exteriorly through contests, risks, struggles, feats, and “not at all something someone is simply born with,” males engage in external activities with certain vigor, and yes, a certain “genius.”<sup>87</sup> They prove themselves by tackling and shaping the world.

Brizendine explains how deeply the orientation towards exteriority shapes the male psyche. She explains that whereas females have a larger anterior cingulate cortex, where scientists believe self-consciousness is located (which may make women less inclined to seek outside themselves for their identity), males on the other hand have a more active ventral tegmental area (VTA), which manufactures dopamine, and a more active mesocorticolimbic system through which dopamine travels throughout the brain.<sup>88</sup> Dopamine is the intensely pleasurable hormone associated with ecstasy, produced in company with winning at competitions, sexual conquest, and other achievements, all of which create a “dopamine rush.”<sup>89</sup> Because males have more active, and in some places two to two and one-half times larger dopamine areas in their brains, they are more sensitive to its effects.<sup>90</sup> These factors, says Brizendine, “may account for gender differences in reward prediction,” and “learning reward values”—both are things at which men excel.<sup>91</sup>

Compared to women, men are more motivated by exterior re-

wards and thus more strongly driven from outside themselves to compete, take risks, and seek sexual engagements. As Francis recognizes, men have a gift for entrance into “the challenges of the wider world.”<sup>92</sup> Of course, a male can easily misdirect his energies and seek merely superficial ends. For instance, studies indicate that males are more willing than women to sacrifice “health, safety, and precious time with family and friends to win status, money and prestige.”<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, the male’s need to seek “outside of himself” can be sublimated into a great and positive creativity. As already mentioned, through masculine exterior initiative come innumerable accomplishments—in the arts, the sciences, the intellectual life, and so on. As males engage in these activities in a constructive way, they reveal their genius for action in the external world. The Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov expresses this well: “The Masculine nature is expressed on the level of deeds that project him beyond himself. Tools lengthen the arm of Man the Worker (*Homo faber*), and the entire world becomes his extended body. All the activities of the builder, the inventor, and the reformer construct the world and order it . . . It is this dominion that creates, out of chaos, a cosmos—a beautiful, well-ordered universe.”<sup>94</sup> If the masculine characteristic of agonistic differentiation concerns drawing a boundary between self and other, the masculine characteristic of exteriority involves confirming and fulfilling oneself through constructive activity in the external world. The male, says Evdokimov, as he “moves out of himself, extends and enlarges himself through his energies.” He “inseminates, actualizes, and builds.” When he does this well, he “makes the world a temple and a liturgy.”<sup>95</sup>

According to the CDF’s letter, all Christians are called to learn the Marian “dispositions of listening, welcoming, humility, fruitfulness, praise and waiting.” However, it states that women are able to live them with “particular intensity and naturalness.”<sup>96</sup> These are contemplative gifts associated with interiority. To supplement the CDF’s letter, it could be stated that there is a corresponding set of gifts, such as prophesying, resisting, building, ordering, and initiating to

which all Christians are also called but that males may live with “particular intensity and naturalness.” These are active gifts, associated with exteriority. Even more will be said about masculinity and discipleship in the next section.

### *3. The order of redemption*

According to Ong, masculinity is meaningful in the order of redemption in three important ways. It entails a particular mode of self-giving, it corresponds to the militant side of faith, and it has an indispensable role in the order of signification.

#### 3.1 SELF-GIVING

In Genesis 3:16, God says to Eve: “Your urge shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (NABRE). According to the CDF, this text illuminates the way that sin negatively altered the relation between males and females. “It will be a relationship in which love will frequently be debased into pure self-seeking, in a relationship which ignores and kills love and replaces it with the yoke of domination of one sex over the other.”<sup>97</sup>

Ong thinks it is possible to go a step further and elaborate the way in which sin has affected each sex differently. Each sex has its own particular genius. Woman’s particular genius is above all her receptive capacity for the other. The feminine drive is to “incorporate, to harbor, to keep.”<sup>98</sup> Evil is a lack that distorts a good, and so her characteristic sin becomes possessiveness: “Your desire shall be for your husband.” This possessiveness is destructive, explains Ong: “Possessiveness can be selfish and kill, and possessiveness relates particularly to woman, as in the widespread mythological symbol of the impersonal, possessive, unwittingly selfish Great Mother, whose children are for her not persons but possessions that she consumes and smothers.”<sup>99</sup> Man’s particular genius is agonistic differentiation from the other. When evil distorts his good, it becomes violent dominance: “He shall rule over you.” Sin diminishes man’s ability to identify and

empathize with the other and inflates his aggressive tendencies. He rebels against, hates, attacks, and subjugates the other. As Ong says: "The typical threat of death from a father is not clutching or smothering or swallowing but brutal dominance. The father destroys by violent blocking or by delivering a direct blow."<sup>100</sup> In short, women typically sin (and kill) by pulling and men typically sin (and kill) by pushing.

Because sin affects male and female differently, both are called to a particular mode of charity as its remedy. Woman counters her possessiveness by allowing others their freedom. For example, when a young child "begins to separate himself or herself from the mother," the mature female practices a "loving skill" by which she "permits and encourages her tiny child to achieve autonomy and individuation, physical and psychic. As the child plays peekaboo, scurries off in a sally of independence, glances back to mother for assurance . . . and otherwise zigzags toward self-confidence, the cooperative interaction of mother and child is truly a beautiful spectacle."<sup>101</sup>

Ong identifies Mary as the perfect type of all feminine charity, particularly as she is depicted in Michaelangelo's *Pietà*.

In the *Pietà* the Virgin Mother has freed herself of all possessiveness, transmuted all eros (love involved in its own need) into agape (love as self-giving, involved with the other). She has done so by lovingly acquiescing to her now adult Son's doing what he was called to do, his Father's will. She leaves her Son completely free, though doing so returns him dead to her arms. And when she takes him dead into her arms, she does not clutch him, but leaves her arms open. The statue tugs at the hearts of women and men alike, but the subject matter is supremely feminine. And it is supreme human freedom: Mary has deliberately chosen to let her Son be about His Father's business. If she had the choice once more, knowing what it would cost, she would do it again. No regrets. Total courage. Her youthful choice is still part of her. Hence her youthful face, often commented on, despite her mature age. Her arms

are open and relaxed. She is completely free, for she is fully aware of what she has chosen.<sup>102</sup>

Mary, says Ong, is a symbol of “creative self-giving” through a particular kind of feminine dying. On the one hand, she has died to herself. “She has given up totally the possessiveness that is both necessary for womanliness and the abiding threat to full womanliness.”<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, through her receptive identification with Christ, “a feminine prerogative,” she has, in a sense, died her own death: “Her maternal identification with Jesus in this supreme act of his, his free offering of his death, was closer than any identification possible for a mere male.”<sup>104</sup>

Masculine charity takes a different form. According to Ong, “a father can suffer untold agony at the loss of a child, but there can be no male *Pietà*. Separation from father is achieved before conception. A father need not be alive when a child is born.”<sup>105</sup> The characteristic masculine sin is not possessiveness but violent dominance. Hence, “self-giving, and possible loss, comes to the male at a different angle. . . . As the female counters her possessive drive by surrendering to others her dearest, the male counters his tendency to violent dominance by placing any violence in him directly at the service of others (the knight errant).”<sup>106</sup> He puts his aggression to work by taking risks, in “valiant exploits” for the sake of the community: “questing, yearning for combat, courting stress situations for others’ sakes, pursuing the impossible dream to his death.”<sup>107</sup> Where Mary is the type of feminine charity, Ong identifies Don Quixote as an image of the “fey” male,<sup>108</sup> destined for death in chivalrous virtue. Don Quixote is surpassed as exemplar for males, however, says Ong, by Christ, in whom a male “counters” with totality “his own proclivities to violence by containing or sublimating them even at the cost of death, which thereby puts his total self at others’ service.”<sup>109</sup>

The modes of self-giving are fitting for each of the sexes. The female’s characteristic sin is possessiveness, which must be remedied by separation. Meanwhile, her gift of receptive identification makes

separation a particularly sacrificial act for her. The male's characteristic sin is domination, which must be remedied by sacrificial service. His characteristics of expendability, agonistic differentiation, and exteriority lead him to readily accept risks that may end in death or humiliation. By making the end of these risks the good of others, he subordinates dominating violent tendencies to the good of service.

### 3.2 THE MILITANCY OF DISCIPLESHIP

The model of discipleship privileged in the CDF's letter is a nuptial one where women have a highlighted role. Mary, the Virgin-Bride-Mother, is held up as a "mirror placed before the Church, in which the Church is invited to recognize her own identity as well as the dispositions of the heart, the attitudes and the actions which God expects from her."<sup>110</sup> From Mary, the Church learns that she is loved in the most profound union with Christ. Also from her, the Church learns how to respond to this love: "The existence of Mary is an invitation to the Church to root her very being in listening to and receiving the Word of God."<sup>111</sup> Women are said to share more naturally in the dispositions of Mary. Accordingly, they are "called to be unique examples and witnesses for all Christians of how the Bride is to respond in love to the call of the Bridegroom."<sup>112</sup> From women, males must learn the Marian dispositions of "listening, welcoming, humility, fruitfulness, praise and waiting."<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the CDF said that without the influence of feminine Christian values, humanity would be closed in "the drama of violence."<sup>114</sup>

Ong agrees that there is an essential and even privileged feminine-nuptial dimension to discipleship. Mary's act of receiving God in faith and becoming fruitful through cooperation with him is "the paradigmatic act on which is modeled that of all Christians who receive God's word."<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless, Ong thinks it is important to recognize that there is also a masculine dimension to discipleship. The Church is not only nuptial bride. She is also a militant warrior. St. Paul points this out many times. For example, he exhorts the faithful: "Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm

against the tactics of the devil . . . Hold faith as a shield to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:11, 16–17 NABRE).<sup>116</sup> This militant dimension of faith corresponds in a particular way to masculinity.

The theme of militancy is almost as prevalent in scripture as the theme of nuptial covenant. As Ong notes: “The Bible, though its deeper message is peace, presents human life on earth, not exclusively, but repeatedly, as a spiritual struggle or warfare carried on paradigmatically by male against male. The concept of Satan takes form in this agonistic milieu—the name Satan means adversary.”<sup>117</sup> Jesus enters the world as a male combatant who engages in a contest of agonistic differentiation with sin and darkness.

In one of its principal aspects Jesus’ work is diaeretic, differentiating, field breaking, as the masculine *agōn* and style are. “I come into this world to divide it” (Jn 9:39). “My mission is to spread, not peace, but division. I have come to set a man at odds with his father, a daughter with her mother . . . to make a man’s enemies those of his own household” (Mt 10:34–36). “I have come to cast fire upon the earth” (Lk 12:49). “He who is not with me is against me” (Mt 12:30). All this despite Jesus’ central and overarching mission of peace.<sup>118</sup>

Christ’s goal, of course, is not dominance but liberation, and his means of attaining it is nonviolent and paschal. Nonetheless, Jesus’ work, says Ong, is still “that of a male fighter,” a “slayer of dragons,” and he accomplishes his feat in a typically male way: “He had to go it alone . . . when the time comes for the agony in the Garden of Olives and for the trial, torture and death that follow, he has to fight the fight by himself, the male loner, destined for high risk combat.”<sup>119</sup>

For Christians, both men and women, this masculine militant dimension of faith remains. After Christ, it is best exemplified in the martyrs. The martyrs accept a certain expendability about themselves in light of a higher purpose. They “go freely to their deaths because

they will not desist from proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News, from telling what Jesus did and said, what he means to them.”<sup>120</sup> They agonistically differentiate good from sin and darkness: “Like Jesus, the martyr, male or female, is a nonviolent agonistic figure, struggling to stand upright in obedient love against attack.”<sup>121</sup> They prove themselves as individuals, for it is primarily within themselves that they must decide whether or not to be faithful, and they earn exterior rewards. According to Ong, the crown God promises to those who persevere (cf. 1 Cor 9:24) and the high honors given to the martyrs through the liturgy—the fact that they “outrank” the other saints—reminds the Church that “each individual Christian, male or female, is held individually accountable for his or her own efforts.”<sup>122</sup>

While not everyone will be called to martyrdom, every Christian is called to place God’s will before his or her own comfort and even survival, to engage in agonistic differentiation from sin through asceticism, and to consider his or her own deeds in the light of judgment. While the CDF warns that without the feminine values of Christianity, the world would be trapped in the “drama of violence,” it could also be said that without these characteristically masculine Christian values, the world would be trapped in self-preservation, false irenicism, and indifference to the eschatological significance of one’s own deeds.

### 3.3 SIGN OF DIVINE OTHERNESS

As already mentioned, the CDF’s letter makes great reference to the fact that in the unfolding of revelation, God’s relationship with the human race, with Israel, and with the Church, has been framed as a nuptial covenant, where God stands as bridegroom and humanity stands as bride. The figure of feminine Israel is summed up in Mary, and the Church, too, finds its “fundamental reference” in her.<sup>123</sup> For this reason, women have an important role in the order of signification. They “contribute in a unique way to showing the true face of the Church, spouse of Christ and mother of believers.”<sup>124</sup> Males, in fact, have to understand this central aspect of their ecclesial identity—as bride

who is anteriorly receptive to and fruitful in cooperation with God— analogously through what is expressed physically by the female.<sup>125</sup>

The CDF's letter offers less reflection on the meaning of masculinity in the order of signification. It does say that masculinity corresponds to scriptural images of "suffering servant" and bridegroom. However, it does not expand on the significance of those signs for discipleship, except to offer the essential masculinity of the bridegroom as a reason for reserving ordination to males.<sup>126</sup> Other magisterial documents have had slightly more to say. John Paul, for example, in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, explains that in the masculine sign of Christ (represented by the priest acting *in persona Christi*), men and women alike receive an example of love as self-sacrificial service, and an analogical reference point for the offices of priest, prophet and king, in which the lay faithful share by virtue of their own Christian initiation. Nevertheless, magisterial reflection (including that of *Amoris Laetitia*) on the sign value of masculinity has been sparse in comparison to its reflection on that of femininity.<sup>127</sup>

Rightfully, the CDF establishes that it is "humanity, sexually differentiated, which is explicitly declared 'the image of God'" by Genesis.<sup>128</sup> Unfortunately, neither the CDF nor Ong elaborates much upon the way in which woman may be able to uniquely image God: for example, God's perfect receptivity, as well as the identifying, uniting, immanent, interiorizing work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>129</sup> Still, Ong does a more thorough job than the CDF's letter in revealing how the masculine, and not just the maleness of the ordained priesthood, images God in a particular way.

According to Ong, the most significant way in which the male signifies the divine is through his otherness. In the reflections above on the exteriority of masculinity, it was established that the close identification of mother and child is juxtaposed to a certain distance between the father and his offspring. Ong further explains: "Among the higher forms of life, above all the egg-laying species, the male's physical relationship to his offspring is distinctively distanced. The male reproductive cell becomes effectively reproductive when it is totally detached

from the male's body and joins the cell that, in the higher forms of life, remains attached to the female. Fathers are essentially distanced from the offspring physically. They can even be dead and buried when the child is born."<sup>130</sup> The experience of father as "distant-different-other" in comparison to the experience of mother as "close-same" will continue through the child's life. "To mother they have been physically and physiologically attached." They will have to separate from her, discover the distinction between mother and self. "Human beings, female or male, never have a comparable problem separating from father: there was no male umbilical cord."<sup>131</sup>

The essential otherness of the male, his distance and difference from the mother-child pair in reproduction corresponds, says Ong, to the distance and difference of God to creation. The female creates within herself, and creation emerges from herself. "Nature is feminine, Mother Nature. Out of her we grow."<sup>132</sup> Masculinity images God in a particular way because God creates outside himself. "The creature's existence establishes nothing new in God": "We do not grow out of God, or out of any consort of his."<sup>133</sup> "Human beings cannot be made *of* him but only 'made in his image and likeness.'<sup>134</sup> Accordingly, God "is likened to the masculine not because he has a masculine physical constitution but because he is a source of existence that is other, different, separated . . . Masculinity stands in the human psyche for a kind of otherness, difference."<sup>135</sup> As Joseph Ratzinger has indicated, this intuition for the essential difference and distance of God from creation led the ancient Hebrews to portray God in masculine language to avoid the pantheism that was typical of Mesopotamian paganism.<sup>136</sup>

Ong also thinks that the post-uterine relation between a child and a good father more closely mirrors the divine-human relation than does the relation between a child and a mother. He highlights two points of correspondence between the child's developmental experience of a human father and humanity's experience of God. The first is transcendence. While a child finds the mother close, God is always "other, different, separated, as a father physically is, and not by becoming so but simply being so. Though he reaches out to

creatures, they cannot themselves reach him."<sup>137</sup> The second reason, which follows from the first, is that both relationships are contingent upon election. Because of the distance between the divine and the human, humanity depends on God to stoop, and like a good father, God overcomes the distance: "He loves us—hence he calls us, his children set off from him, and draws us near to him with love."<sup>138</sup>

Other scholars have acknowledged the important role an involved human father plays in signifying transcendence. John W. Miller explains that the mother, often assuming a role of "unconditional caretaker," is indispensable in giving the child an internalized sense of security and well-being. However, due to the initial symbiotic nature of the mother-child relationship, fathers play a crucial role through their presence as "significant other" in alerting the child to the fact that there is a world distinct from the mother toward which he or she must move if he or she is to gain a sense of his or her independence.<sup>139</sup> José Granados elaborates:

It belongs to the woman to teach the child . . . that every human being is always surrounded by the original gift of creation. However, it is precisely this connection that hides a risk: that of the confusion between the child and the mother, of not distinguishing sufficiently between them. What the father contributes, then, is the appearance of a primordial separation in the world of the child. To be sure, the father is aware of the child belonging to him, but he sees it as a distance that needs to be covered. This distance allows the child to grow in his encounter with the world and to understand his life as a journey toward transcendence.<sup>140</sup>

Indeed, studies show that the presence of a good nonabusive father aids children's liberation from oedipal attachment to the mother and helps them to consolidate differentiated identity.<sup>141</sup>

The second point, that there is something inherently more contingent upon election in the father-child relationship than the mother-child relationship, has also been developed by Miller. He observes:

After sexual intercourse there is no *biologically* compelling reason for the male to have anything further to do with the child he may have engendered. Rather, from the moment of conception onward the growth of the fetus is solely the affair of the female. For nine months it develops in her womb and then is born of her body and suckles at her breasts. A female may choose to abort her child, or abandon it at birth, but if she allows biology to take its course, she will become a mother to her child by an inevitable natural process. Nature does not dictate to the same degree what a male's role shall be in the life of his child.<sup>142</sup>

Involved fatherhood is less self-evident than motherhood, and thus, more "fragile."<sup>143</sup> Where motherhood is strongly supported by natural processes, fatherhood is easier to avoid and requires a great intentionality.

Miller notes that involved fathers did not appear historically until several conditions had occurred. A conscious connection had to be made between coitus and the generation of offspring. Sexually exclusive bonds had to be established such that a father would know a child was his and not some other man's. Females had to see paternal engagement with their children as beneficial and invite it. Finally, males had to accept the invitation to responsibility. There are, Miller observes, places in the world where these conditions have never occurred or where they are currently waning. In these places, fatherhood is also in decline.<sup>144</sup>

Historically, fatherhood received its strongest support, says Miller, in the Judeo-Christian tradition that recognizes God as the model father. Miller argues that in calling God "Father," the biblical tradition was not claiming biological maleness for God, but emphasizing that God, like a good father, chose to remain in relationship with those who needed him. The people of God experienced their heavenly father as one who elected them, liberated them, and instructed them. He was markedly unlike the other male gods of antiquity: "not cowardly or withdrawn . . . but alert rather, vigorously involved."<sup>145</sup> God's charac-

terization as “jealous” highlighted his own acceptance of responsibility for his household and his desire for his presence to be accepted by his family.<sup>146</sup> Fatherhood, therefore, was revealed to be something more than simply male contribution to reproduction. It meant elective, active, gratuitous engagement. In calling God “Father,” the biblical tradition was making a double claim that human fatherhood should be patterned after God’s chosen commitment to love and that a good human father signified the divine one when he followed suit.<sup>147</sup>

Masculine paternal imagery for God has been privileged in scripture. Though God is compared in places to a mother (cf. Is 49:15; 66:13; Mt 23:37), God is never addressed as mother, and there is no place in the Hebrew scriptures where a feminine predication of God is accompanied by a feminine subject.<sup>148</sup> Ong thinks this preference for masculine imagery, because it is associated with otherness and difference, serves the important purpose of establishing the difference and distance between God and creation, of driving home to the faithful that even if humankind is created in God’s image and likeness, God remains utterly transcendent.<sup>149</sup> He also believes it highlights humanity’s dependence on God’s elective choice to reach out and claim us. To conceive of God in this way is humbling, and masculine imagery supports it while still maintaining the identity of God as personal.

One can legitimately question whether Ong has given enough attention to qualities of God that might be characterized as feminine. A number of esteemed authors have accepted that, while still respecting the normative prayer language of the Bible and the governing principles of analogy, it is possible to acknowledge a feminine dimension to the Godhead and thus perceive ways in which woman uniquely images the divine. Both John Paul and Francis, for example, acknowledged that women signify divine maternal qualities.<sup>150</sup> Most often the maternal quality of divinity is associated with the Holy Spirit. Yves Congar highlighted several reasons for this attribution. First, the Spirit is the abiding, immanent presence of God.<sup>151</sup> God is not only transcendent Father, but “remains present within the world he creates” and is “closer to us than we are to ourselves.”<sup>152</sup> Marie-

Joseph Le Guillou identified this immanence as both pneumatic and maternal. He explained that because woman “refers to the mystery of the Father through the love with which she envelops” her child, she “reflects something of the spirit in which the Son dwells.”<sup>153</sup> Second, the Spirit corresponds to maternity because the Spirit gives birth to Christ in the soul and in the Church (cf. Jn 3:5).<sup>154</sup> Therefore, as Hans Urs von Balthasar put it: “God’s relation to the world is not only masculine, as *Deus Faber*, but womb-like and feminine.”<sup>155</sup> Third, the Spirit is credited with nurturing the faithful and introducing them to the Father. Thus, the Spirit’s activity corresponds to that of a human mother and to Mary, who also “forms Jesus in us,” and “reveals Jesus who in turn reveals the Father.”<sup>156</sup> Finally, the Spirit, who receives the gift of being from the Father and the Son and unites them in love, appears to be the most perfect sign of receptivity and unity (in contrast to masculine differentiation) within the Godhead.<sup>157</sup> In agreement with Congar, Ratzinger states: “Because of the teaching about the Spirit, one can, as it were, practically have a presentiment of the primordial type of the feminine, in a mysterious, veiled manner, within God Himself.”<sup>158</sup> Despite Ong’s neglect of this line of thought, he does effectively show how males, in their paternity, signify the transcendence and gratuitous election of God the Father, the right conception of which is important for the humility and dependence on divine condescension that so mark the life of faith.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article has been an attempt to articulate a profile of the masculine genius that could supplement the more complete profile of the feminine genius that has heretofore been provided by the magisterium, especially the CDF’s 2004 “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World.” Drawing from the work of Walter J. Ong and others, this article has demonstrated that the masculine genius builds upon a set of natural traits, namely, expendability, agonistic differentia-

tion, and exteriority, which complement feminine durability, receptive identification, and interiority. It has also shown that masculinity has significance in the order of redemption, where it entails a particular mode of self-giving (self-sacrifice as opposed to sacrifice through separation), typifies the militant dimension of discipleship (as complementary to nuptial discipleship), and uniquely signifies the otherness of God.

Identification of the masculine genius is a vital task requiring further development. Excepting the equal—though still relatively sparse—attention Francis gives to masculinity in *Amoris Laetitia*, recent magisterial teaching has been mostly marked by a great and by all means appropriate celebration of the importance of feminine values in the Church and in the life of discipleship. However, when attention to the theological meaning of femininity is not accompanied by reflection on masculinity, men are left without a sense of the existential and sacramental significance of their own sex. This lacuna can only exacerbate the often-observed problem of a gender gap in ecclesial membership: women are much more likely than men to self-identify as religious and participate in the Church.<sup>159</sup> While evangelical “muscular Christianity” and New Age movements based in Jungian archetypes and borrowed indigenous rituals are attempting to meet a widely perceived cultural crisis in masculinity, Catholic theology is only now beginning to offer alternatives. Decades ago, Ong performed a great service by providing a profile of masculinity drawn from sound science and theology that can serve as a resource for a renewal in male discipleship. It is time to give his work the attention it deserves.

### Notes

1. Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016) 55, Vatican English translation at the Vatican website, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf).
2. *AL*, 286, 175.

3. *AL*, 28.
4. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 31, Vatican English translation in *Origins* 18 (October 6, 1988): 261, 263–83; Cf. “Letter to Women” (June 29, 1995), Vatican English translation in *Origins* 25 (July 27, 1995): 137, 139–43; and Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (March 25, 1996) 34 and 58, Vatican English translation in *Origins* 25 (April 4, 1996): 681, 683–717.
5. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” (May 31, 2004), 2, Vatican English translation in *Origins* 34 (August 26, 2004): 169, 171–76. Hereafter, “Letter.”
6. “Letter,” 13.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 16.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, 9–10.
11. *Ibid.*, 14.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 17.
14. *AL*, 173–75, at 173.
15. *AL*, 55.
16. *AL*, 175.
17. Cf. *AL*, 176–77.
18. In referring to the existence of complementary gifts, I am following the CDF “Letter,” § 7, which states that men and women are called to “active collaboration” as equals whose “equal dignity as persons is realized as physical, psychological and ontological complementarity.” Rarely, except when referring explicitly to male and female sexed bodies, do I mean to imply mutual exclusivity. Prudence Allen refers to mutually exclusive versions of complementarity as “fractional,” implying that men and women each represent a half of human nature, the content of which never overlaps with that possessed by the other sex. Allen argues instead for “integral complementarity,” a more holistic starting point that recognizes the completeness of human nature in both male and female persons. Allen’s theory of integral complementarity recognizes male and female persons as both being integral wholes, both possessing masculine and feminine traits. Allen’s theory has room, however, for a proportionality of gifts and acknowledges that men and women find fulfillment as persons in mutual relation. This article accepts Allen’s theory, though it may go even further than she does in asserting that male and female embodiment typically involves men and women in the possession of certain strengths and predilection for certain roles in the social sphere. Still, the fact that one sex may be predominantly gifted for actualizing some characteristics and roles need not prevent the other sex from developing them. Indeed, nonexclusivity coincident with special giftedness is implied by the language of “genius.” John Paul II and the CDF both indicate clearly that males should learn

- to embody many of the values they witness in the lives of women. The same should apply in reverse: woman can learn from and appropriate what is typically masculine. Such an approach, I believe, also honors Francis's appeal that gender categories not be overly rigid. See Prudence Allen, "Integral Sex Complementarity and the Theology of Communion," *Communio* 17.4 (Winter, 1990): 523–44.
19. Cf. Walter J. Ong, *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness* (Cornell University Press, 1981), 11.
  20. "Letter," 13.
  21. *Ibid.*
  22. Ong, 56 and 99.
  23. *Ibid.*, 54.
  24. *Ibid.*, 52–56, at 54. See also 83.
  25. *Ibid.*, 52.
  26. *Ibid.*, 53.
  27. *Ibid.*
  28. *Ibid.*
  29. *Ibid.*
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. *Ibid.*, 56.
  32. *Ibid.*, 99.
  33. Helen Fisher, *The First Sex: The Natural Talents of Women and How They are Changing the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 157.
  34. Cf. *Ibid.*, 42, 157–60.
  35. Cf. Louann Brizendine, *The Male Brain* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010), xvii.
  36. *Ibid.*, 5.
  37. Cf. *Ibid.*, xviii, 103–104.
  38. *Ibid.*, 102. Emphasis mine.
  39. Fisher, 160.
  40. *Ibid.*, 165.
  41. Seen in this light, the sailor's code "women and children first" reflects a profound natural instinct. When a choice must be made about whose survival should be prioritized and who can be allowed to risk death or die, the female's survival is prioritized and the male is the one who is considered expendable. An interesting line of inquiry is whether the biblical laws of sacrifice are meant to theologically affirm this instinct. It is strenuously stipulated throughout the Old Testament that the sacrificial animal, especially the Paschal lamb, must be male (cf. Ex 12:5; Lv 1:3, 10; 4:23; 22:19). Perhaps this stipulation does not, as is often thought, simply reflect an antique bias in which the male was seen as more valuable and thus a more worthy sacrifice, but instead, indicates a divine preference for the survival of the female because the death of the female is more harmful for the continuation of life.
  42. "Letter," 13.
  43. Cf. *ibid.*, 13, 15–16.

44. *Ibid.*, 13.
45. Ong, 102 and 77.
46. *Ibid.*, 102.
47. *Ibid.*, 77.
48. *Ibid.*, 77.
49. Ong, 64–65. See Brizendine 12–14 for a more detailed description of the role played by the male's own testosterone in masculinizing his brain and body during the embryonic, fetal, and infant periods of life.
50. Ong, 65.
51. *Ibid.* Interior quotes from Robert Stoller, *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968), 264–65.
52. Ong, 70.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, 70–71.
56. *Ibid.*, 70.
57. Brizendine, 14.
58. *Ibid.*, 19. Brizendine also reports here on an interesting study of rhesus monkeys: "Researchers gave the young male and female monkeys a choice between a wheeled vehicle, the 'masculine' toy, and a plush doll figure, the 'feminine' toy. The males almost exclusively spent time playing with the wheeled toy. But the females played equal amounts of time with the doll and the wheeled toy." According to Brizendine, because monkeys would seem to be immune to the biases of human socialization, the study supports the idea that females, by nature, have more breadth and flexibility in their pursuits, where males are, by nature, more specific and exclusive in their pursuits.
59. Cf. Ong, 71–73.
60. *Ibid.*, 79.
61. *Ibid.*, 59. For more on the forms and purposes of "ritual combat" see Ong, 35–36, 70–80, 103–115, and 119–66.
62. *Ibid.*, 81. It is notable that boys spend 65% of playtime competing against each other compared to only 35% for girls (cf. Brizendine, 18). Also, boys wrestle each other six times more often than girls do (cf. Brizendine, 21).
63. Ong, 81.
64. *Ibid.*, 82
65. Fisher provides a significant statistic: males "commit 87% of violent crimes in America—a percentage that is probably matched in many other countries" (Fisher, 157). Cf. Ong, 62, 67–70 for his analysis of the association of agonism and violence.
66. Cf. Ong, 32–36 for his celebration of the positive role agonism has played in cultural achievement, and 170 for his thoughts on agonism's importance to theological development.
67. Cf. *ibid.*, 77.

68. Fisher, 5–6.
69. Cf. Brizendine, 12, 26–27.
70. Ibid., 97.
71. Ibid., xviii.
72. Ibid., 97. Emphasis Brizendine's.
73. "Letter," 3.
74. Ibid., 8. Cf. 13.
75. John Paul II, *Male and Female He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 154.
76. Ong, 90.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid., 41.
79. Ibid., 98.
80. Ibid.
81. Cf. *ibid.*
82. Cf. *ibid.*, 175.
83. Cf. *ibid.*, 74–75. It is interesting to note that "scientists who screen people for genetic diseases typically find that about 10% of children tested are not the genetic offspring of their supposed fathers" (Fisher, 266).
84. Ong, 98. Along the same lines, Edith Stein believed the "detachment of seed in the reproductive function in the male" was the principle "corporeal structure" determining the masculine "psychic, intellectual, and spiritual orientation." It characterized the male as more intellectually and cognitively detached and focused his personality toward exterior life. Prudence Allen, "Sex and Gender Differentiation in Hildegard of Bingen and Edith Stein," *Communio* 20 (Summer, 1993): 389–414, at 393.
85. Ong, 98.
86. Cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18.
87. Ong, 98.
88. Cf. Brizendine, xvii; 143–44, n. 25.
89. Ibid., 22. Cf. *ibid.*, xx.
90. Cf. *ibid.*, 146, n. 33.
91. Ibid., 143–44, n. 25.
92. *AL*, 175.
93. Fisher, 30.
94. Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994), 215.
95. Ibid., 261.
96. "Letter," 16.
97. Ibid., 7.
98. Ong, 102.
99. Ibid., 100.

100. Ibid., 102.
101. Ibid., 100.
102. Ibid., 101.
103. Ibid., 100.
104. Ibid., 181.
105. Ibid., 101.
106. Ibid., 101–2.
107. Ibid., 101–2.
108. Ibid., 99.
109. Ibid., 102.
110. “Letter,” 15.
111. Ibid., 15.
112. Ibid., 16.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid., 17.
115. Ong, 177.
116. See also Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:7, 10:4; 1 Thes 5:8.
117. Ong, 169.
118. Ibid., 178.
119. Ibid., 180.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid., 181.
122. Ibid., 180–181.
123. “Letter,” 15. Cf. 9–10.
124. Ibid., 16.
125. Cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 20. According to the CDF: “This bride, of whom the Letter to the Ephesians speaks, is present in each of the baptized and is like one who presents herself before her Bridegroom.” “Letter,” 10.
126. Cf. “Letter,” 15–16.
127. Cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 27.
128. “Letter,” 5.
129. See David L. Schindler “Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 200–239; Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith, 3 vols. (New York: Seabury; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 1:155–64, 3:155–64.
130. Ong, 175.
131. Ibid.
132. Ibid.
133. Ibid., 177; 175.
134. Ibid., 177. Emphasis Ong’s.
135. Ibid., 175.
136. Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*,

- trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 139–40.
137. Ong, 176.
138. *Ibid.*, 175.
139. John W. Miller, *Calling God "Father": Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood and Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 119.
140. José Granados, "Priesthood: A Sacrament of the Father," *Communio* 36 (Summer, 2009): 194–95.
141. Cf. Miller, 119.
142. Miller, 12.
143. *Ibid.*, 17.
144. Cf. *ibid.*, 12–15.
145. *Ibid.*, 43.
146. *Ibid.*, 42.
147. Cf. *ibid.*, 55 and 116–18. It should be noted that the revelation of God as "Father" is a progressive development within the scriptures. While Yahweh was consistently portrayed as male by the sacred authors, initially he was more often given titles from the social sphere (ex. "King," "Lord"), rather than familial ones. The prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, and the author of the third book of Isaiah began to describe God as a father, but there is only one direct invocation of God as "Father" in the Old Testament (Deut 32:6). The invocation of God as Father becomes normative only in the New Testament with its revelation of Jesus Christ as Son and image of the Father. See Paul Ricoeur, "Fatherhood: From Phantasm to Symbol," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 468–97.
148. Cf. Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 234.
149. Cf. Ong, 176–77.
150. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 8 and *AL*, 172
151. Cf. Congar, 3:156.
152. Schindler, 210. See also St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.7.
153. Marie-Joseph le Guillou, "The Name of the Father," *Communio* (Summer, 2009): 366–67.
154. Cf. Congar, 3:161.
155. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 223.
156. Congar, 1:163.
157. Cf. *ibid.*, 3:160.
158. Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), 26–27.
159. Cf. Ong, 178; See also Patricia Wittberg, "A Lost Generation," *America* (February 20, 2012): 13–14.

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