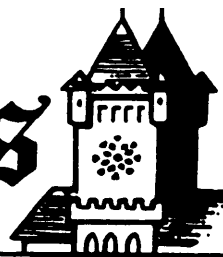


The Geneva Papers



No. 34

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December, 1984

A SACRAMENTAL/SYMBOLIC MODEL FOR MALE AND FEMALE

by Ray R. Sutton

At Christmas time, Mary, the mother of Jesus becomes a predominant figure of interest. She is the Mother of our Lord, and the Church concentrates on His birth in which she had an important role. Rome has wrongfully deified her, and Protestantism has generally missed the imagery of her role altogether. Nevertheless, with the attention comes thought about the family and specifically the *role of the woman*.

In 1984, we have seen the Church's traditional view of the woman challenged. I can go so far as to say that most of the conservative Reformed denominations are considering the office of "Deaconess." And, recently the Anglican Church, against the wishes of the Archbishop of Canterbury, decided to ordain women. So, the problem is not confined any longer to "liberal" denominations. There is a trend in our society which has caused much confusion about the roles of man and woman. At the top of the list producing the confusion are some serious theological problems. Several years ago, the neo-evangelical world was delighted, or at least horrified, at Paul Jewett's *Man as Male and Female*. Jewett developed Barth's insight that Adam and Eve *relationally* imaged God. His conclusion is that since male and female *together* are the image of God (Gen. 1:26ff.), God created functional "equality" among men and women. It is not surprising that many "feminists" have used Jewett's thesis against Bible believing Christians. Nevertheless the problem with Jewett's premises and conclusions is presuppositional.

First, although I agree with Barth's basic insight, we must realize a oneness and manyness to the imaging of God. Man and woman *together* image God in a corporate sense. But man in his singularity also images God. Adam as a man is said to be the image of God (Gen. 5:1ff.). Thus, Jewett pushes Barth's insight to the point where the oneness image of God is obliterated. Theologically, an overemphasis on the corporate imaging of God would break down the Biblical rationale for *male representation in the persons of Adam and Christ*. Practically speaking, the single individual, like the Apostle Paul, would be left wondering how he, as an individual, is unique in reflecting the image of God. When we push on Jewett's position, we find that the Biblical man does not want to attempt to put the one against the many, even if to make a point.

Second, Jewett assumes that equality in being-man and woman are of equal worth in terms of their *essence*—rules out *functions*/subordination. Thus, the traditional roles of headship in the husband (Eph. 5:22ff.), and submission in the woman (Eph. 5:22) are unjustifiable. But we see that Jesus, as the Son of God, submitted to the Father. Economically, he submitted even though ontologically, He is God.

In a recent interview, Jewett was asked how he reconciled

Paul's statement that women are not to exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:11ff.), on the one hand, with the fact that the Bible also teaches equality in Christ between the sexes, on the other. Jewett's response was that Paul was wrong! When a sexual model for coping with role problems violates the integrity of Scripture, I think one needs to reconsider his understanding of the roles.

Jewett pushes his position so far that he hints at bi-sexuality within the Godhead and man. I know, however, that Jewett denies hi-sexuality in both categories. And, even though some have gone too far with his position, he cannot be entirely responsible.

Nevertheless, the whole question of hi-sexuality is an issue in our society. Teenage idols are appealing to our youth culture on the basis of hi-sexuality. Perhaps this problem is one of the few aspects of the "1984" culture that Orwell was right about. But when God's *transcendent* Word is rejected, man defines roles relatively on the basis of function. And, in a high-tech society where men and women can do the same things, the traditional view of roles has been devastated.

My main problem, however, with extending the Jewett model of hi-sexuality into the Godhead is the premise of the "analogy of being" (*analogia entis*). In other words, God and man end up having the same "essence." Yet, continuity in "being" between God and man does not exist. God is Spirit and man is dust (Gen. 2:8). God is not sexual in a physical sense because He does not have a body. Sexuality in man is symbolic of *ethical* realities in God. For example, humanity has certain roles in an analogous way to the Godhead. But there is no *analogia entis* (analogy of being).

One other factor contributing to the confusion of the roles of man and woman centers around recent reaction to the "Victorian Ideal." In the last century, the woman was viewed as a dainty bird in a cage. Her purpose was to live in this cage, the house, and be a pet to the husband. In the words of Ann Douglas, the Victorian interpretation of woman has led to a basic "feminization of America."¹ Women in the

1. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of America* (New York: Knopf, 1977). The author's premise is that America views the woman as dainty and weak because of the influence of the Victorian Era. Imagery which comes out of this period has dominated for the last 150 years. The "feminization" process has affected other areas. One of the places this conception of weakness appears is in the clergy. She points out that during the Puritan Era at the beginning of America, clergymen were viewed as strong and adventuresome. Most clergy, for example, were avid hunters (pp. 80ff.). Furthermore, in the Church, theology has been replaced with sentimentality and emotionalism (pp. 121 ff.). Thus, the Victorian model has destroyed the concept of strength in men, women, and the Church.

20th century are reacting to this model, and leaving the home to work at men's jobs. Men, in turn are leaving work to take on more domestic responsibility.

How has the Church dealt with the attack on traditional roles? Unfortunately, the Church has reacted to the reaction, and all too often argued for either a basic "Victorian (Fundamentalist) or Feminist (Liberal) Ideal." But we must ask, "Is either the Victorian or the feminist model of womanhood Biblical?" Do we, as people committed to the Bible, have another model? A brief Biblical examination of the approach of Scripture brings us to *sacramental/symbolic language* model.

Sacramental and Symbolic Language

The very beginning chapters of Genesis present us with two kinds of language, sacramental and symbolic. What God says is sacramental and what man says is of a symbolic character since he is an "image" (Gen. 1:26). Respectively, these types of communication correspond to and form a foundation for the roles of man and woman. To be more specific, let us begin with a more detailed explanation. What is sacramental language?

Sacramental language is God's Word. By the word *sacrament* we mean two things. One, we mean *fiat*. *Fiat* is the Latin word for "let there be" used to translate that phrase in the *Vulgate*.² In Genesis, God's statement, "Let there be," brings the created world into existence. We could say the world is brought about by *fiat* command. God's Word automatically materializes whatever is called into existence. When God speaks, His command is accomplished. In other words, *sacramental* language establishes.

Two, *sacramental* language sustains what has been established. God did this by creating a world that could support the creation. But the world was not intended to run by itself. As the world had been established by His Word, it could only be sustained by the same. So, God continued to communicate to man. This communication is called the written Word of God. Therefore, *sacrament/* language establishes and sustains.

Symbolic language is the language of humanity. Man was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:28). His purpose is basically *symbolic* and his language bears this out. One, man's language is imitative. Whatever humanity says can only be a copy of what God has already said, even though human language can distort what God has said, and become a "cheap" imitation. Two, humanity's communication is *responsorial*. It is designed to answer back to God what He has created and said. Therefore, *sacrament/* language actually brings something about, and *symbolic* language duplicates what has been created.

One further word of clarification needs to be made before we apply our model to the actual roles of man and woman. I have made a *sacramental/symbolic* distinction between God's and man's language. Yet, we should see that God's language is full of symbols. Indeed, all language is a symbol. Even the very letters of the alphabet are symbols. Granted we can make a difference between literary and grammatical symbol, but the use of symbol — "Jesus is a vine" (Jn. 15:1ff.) — is present in God's language, the Bible. Therefore, God's language is not *just* symbolic. His symbols are real! What God says via symbol *really* happened in history, what He commands in the present has *real* blessings and curses attached, and what God says will happen in the future will *really* take place. So, although *sacrament/* language has a symbolic nature, it is still the type of language that establishes, initiates, and creates — features brought out in our earlier discussion of *sacrament/* language.

What does the *sacramental/symbolic* model have to do with the basic roles of man and woman? Everything. When we read about the creation of man and woman and their

union, the language between them follows the *sacrament/symbolic* pattern. Just after God creates Eve from Adam's rib, Adam gives the name "woman" to the female (Gen. 2:23). Then, Moses adds editorially that a "man shall leave his father and mother." Notice that the male takes on the basic *sacrament/* role. He is the one who establishes the marriage through communication. And he is the one who sustains the marriage through the unique communication which results from his leaving and cleaving (Gen. 2:24).

Parenthetically, I am not saying that the man is a sacrament, but only that the man's role is a *picture* of the *real* sacrament, God and His Word. Nevertheless, we see the Biblical rationale why the man should be the one who serves the sacraments. Women should never be priests, and/or serve the sacraments. Hence, only men are to be elders.

The first woman, on the other hand, is conspicuously silent after creation. That is, she is verbally silent, but the body language is obvious. The only way to describe what she does is with the word "responds." She answers back to man by co-operating with and following him. Her role, therefore, is *symbolic* in that it images what the man had initiated.

The point is that the roles of man and woman represent a basic language pattern of the universe which reflects the relationship of God to man. That is, man's function stands for the role of God, and woman's represents the role of humanity.

So, the primary purpose of marriage is to portray the relationship between God and man. When communication between God and man is fleshed out in the roles of marriage, man becomes the initiator, woman the responder, and together they image the relationship between God and man. Therefore, let us now observe the *sacramental/symbolic* pattern throughout the Bible and begin to understand better the practical ramifications.

Biblical Examples

One, the Serpent's temptation of Eve (Gen. 3) re-enforces what we are saying, except the roles are reversed. When the Serpent seduces the woman, he gets her to communicate for the family. For the first time, the woman communicates outside the home. Notice that the woman takes the apple to the man. In other words, she serves the sacrament. This time, man is conspicuously silent, and the *sacramental/symbolic* distinction is born out negatively.

Two, after God judges all parties involved in the fall of man, something else happens to show that the roles have been put back into original function: Adam renames the woman (Gen. 3:20). By renaming her, he takes on the basic communicative role. The name given to woman was "Eve" which means "mother of all living." At the fall, Eve had moved out of her assigned role and not properly imaged humanity. She had attempted to take on the male's role. In her new name, we see that she takes back the role of representing humanity. She, more than the male, symbolizes man.

Three, moving to the New Testament, we see the same designations. When Paul comes to a discussion of the role of man and woman, he (along with Peter) begins his discussion of roles with the woman. Should we conclude that the roles of man and woman are reversed in the New Testament?

Our model clarifies. Paul begins with the woman because she represents the Church. His concerns in the second half of his letter to the Ephesians, were commands that would cause the Ephesians to act like God's Bride. In the first half of the book, Paul explained what God, the Groom of the Church, had done. Since the second half is "hortatory" in character, Paul is concentrating on the Church, the Bride of God. So, we would expect Paul to begin with the woman in his discussion of marriage roles (Eph. 5:22ff.).

Finally, we should point out that these role distinctions are born out in a practical way. A man tends to engross (to stand outside and observe), whereas, a woman tends to *embrace* (to stand within and embrace). Watch the difference between the man's and the woman's response to a hurt

2. The Latin translation of the Bible.

child. The man talks to the child and asks if it's all right. The woman, however, picks up the child and cuddles. Hand a baby to a man. He'll hold the baby out in front of himself, perpendicular to the ground. He may even begin to extend the perpendicularity by tossing the baby up and down in the air. Women almost never do this. The woman takes a baby up into her arms. A woman gives toys to a child, and a man gives himself in play. In each difference, the man "engrosses" and the woman "encompasses"? This is just another way of saying the man communicates or initiates, and the woman reflects or responds by cuddling and protecting.

Also, the engrossing pattern is in men in that they are generally more preoccupied with the woman's appearance than is the woman with her own looks. In most marriages where the woman has some sort of cosmetic surgery, it is due to the man's desire that the woman remain attractive. He may not have directly commented, but most of the time it is what he does not say about the beauty of the wife that lets her know she's fading in appearance. Why is the man this way? Ephesians says, "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her that she might . . . have no spot or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:25-27). This says that man's glory is wrapped up in the woman's appearance. A beautiful woman says a lot about the man. So, there's nothing wrong with a man's concern about the woman's beauty. Of course, it has to be kept in perspective. Women grow old and the character of their beauty changes. Nevertheless, the man takes a removed position, stands back, and engrosses.

The woman, on the other hand, touches. She wants the man to hold her when she's upset. But he wants to talk about it. She goes to the store and picks up the fruit to see if it's ripe. The man, however, will go more by looks.

Implications

What's the real benefit of the basic *sacramental/symbolic* model. First, it properly defines the essential differences between man and woman. Listen to people in the Church talk about the basic differences between man and woman. Often they will say that man is basically rational and the woman is irrational. That's just not true. Watch a man at a football game. He'll be quite emotional. Most men have trouble controlling their tempers. This doesn't sound like it fits the basic rational/irrational distinction.

Second, the *sacramental/symbolic* model explains why man and woman can do the same kinds of things. The man's role was created to represent Christ, and the woman's role was established to represent the Bride of Christ. In other words, the woman is not secondary to man. What the woman represents, humanity, is secondary to God. Thus, their respective roles do not have anything to do with innate ability. The fact of the matter is, the woman is generally all-around stronger than the man. Her weakness is in the fact that she represents humanity that is weaker than God.

The basic *sacramental/symbolic* characteristics criss-cross in man and woman. Man was created primarily to be an initiator, and secondarily a responder. Woman, however, was created to be a responder primarily, and a communicator secondarily. Both can do the same kinds of things. This criss-cross effect clarifies why women are sometimes found in the Bible doing what men should be doing. Deborah judged, and other women were prophetesses. Functionally, women can serve in the gaps which the men leave, and men can serve in the gaps that women leave.

Third, the *sacramental/symbolic* model not only clarifies why men and women can do the same kinds of things, but why a woman's replacement of the man was always temporary in the Bible. Whenever God tails up a woman to do what a man should be doing, like in the case of Deborah (Jud. 4-5), it could only last a short time. God made man according to the *sacramental* model. God built this into his being. Consequently, man will return to his created role through redemption. So, Deborah attempted to hand the

sacramental responsibility to Barak. Even though he failed, however, the next Judge after Deborah was Gideon (Jud. 6ff.), and it would be a long time before Israel ever had a female leader again.

Why? God told the woman at the fall, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). From the contrast in this verse, the "desire" of the fallen woman is to rule. She will attempt to take up a sacramental role. Yet, God made the man to function sacramentally, and the woman symbolically. So, the woman will be ruled by the man. God guarantees it.

There is more. Since function does not determine essence, a woman could do diaconal activities, for example, without becoming a deacon. In other words, there is not a category of women deacons, only deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:11). Very simply put, women who do deacon functions are deaconesses, not deacons. Women who do prophetic functions are not prophets, but prophetesses (Since a priest is a guard, and the woman is that which is guarded, there are no "priestesses" in Scripture). Again, we have to understand the essential created differences between man and woman. When a woman leads, she does so from *within* the bride. When a man leads, he does so *outside of* the bride. As we noted earlier, the man takes an engrossment position and the woman an encompassing position. An elder, for example, might be a member of the local congregation, but he should also be a member of Presbytery which is outside of the congregation. A woman might be called upon to lead the congregation, as in some cases on the mission field, but she should never be a member of Presbytery.

Therefore, the *sacramental/symbolic* model is foundational to any understanding of the roles of man and woman. The man has a sacramental role, and the woman, a symbolic function. This leads us to three practical applications.

Application

First, the man carries somewhat of a tension within him because he not only represents what he *is* (a human), but what he *is not* (the Divine Husband). Thus, he stands alongside of the female as part of the bride. This is often a problem for the man because in his essence, he is a human being just like the woman. But also in his essence, he is male. Thus, both of these aspects are bound up in man. This tension expresses itself in an ambivalence. It is much easier for a man to see life from a woman's point of view than it is for a woman to see life from the man's. Consequently, a woman often thinks her husband does not understand what she is going through. As a matter of fact, he does.

For the woman, however, the same tension does not exist. She has a symbolic role as a female and as a woman. Sometimes it is much easier for her to make decisions for this reason. Anyone has a hard time making decisions if he is not used to making them. So, I am not talking about the woman who never makes a decision. But for the woman who is given a reasonable amount of opportunity to make decisions, she may find that decisions come easier.

Second the *sacramental/symbolic* principle resolves the polygamy (having more than one wife) issue. What's the issue? The issue is "how could God bless a polygamist relationship?" We find in the case of David and Solomon that God blessed them even though they were both involved in polygamy. In the case of David, for example, the Messianic line comes through Bathsheba, a woman with whom David committed polygamy. Yet, at other times, God forbids polygamy (Ezr. 10:11), and judged it.

We must remember that the King of Israel had a *sacramental* role. He represented God. Thus, when the king committed polygamy, he pictured God's having more than one bride. Such an act broke down the monogamous base of the relationship which was to exist between God and His people. Two brides symbolized that God was in covenant with two people. God attacks this very kind of reasoning

through Moses when He says, "They have made me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation" (Deut. 32:21).

Jealousy is the basis of God's monogamous commitment to His people. Two wives, or two husbands for that matter (which is what idolatry symbolized), provoke God to wrath. Abraham brought trouble to his house for attempting to produce seed through another woman (Gen. 16). Essentially, he took Hagar as a pseudo "wife." Sarah became jealous for Isaac and cast out Hagar. Having a second wife led to a second son, and God could have only one true son. In this account, therefore, we see that there can only be one true bride, one true son, and one true people of God. Accordingly, when a King or a patriarch entered polygamous relationships, disaster followed.

The house of David is a clear example. David had many wives, the result of which was many sons. Those sons fought continually over the throne. Eventually, the favorite wife, Bathsheba, prevailed on David for Solomon. But Solomon still ended up fighting with other sons.

In the case of Solomon, his marriages to foreign wives were political, not sensual. Nevertheless, Solomon was to bring them into the bride, not create "many foreign wives." Solomon was a type of Christ in that he included all the nations of the earth into covenant with Israel. This is precisely what happened in the New Covenant. Every tribe, nation, and tongue are brought in (Rev. 5:9).

When Solomon absorbed the religions of the foreign wives he reversed the imagery. He misrepresented God in that Solomon created the image of a Unitarian God with many wives. And, Solomon misrepresented the bride, since he was also part of the bride, chasing after other gods.

After Solomon, we find that his sons continued to fight. Thus, every time we find polygamy, even though God's Sovereignty eventually overcomes, the polygamous marriage brings destruction and trouble to the people of God.

The other times we find polygamy in the Old Testament are rare. So, we must not think that God tolerated polygamy on any large scale. Moreover, there is another important distinction to be made. God worked around the polygamy of Kings or Patriarchs, but He never tolerated polygamy among the people. This was the case in the time of the reconstruction of Israel. God commanded Ezra to lead the people out of their polygamous relationships. The people were to be the bride of God. Their role was to symbolize God's voice to them, or answer back in faithfulness. So, polygamy broke down their symbolic role.

Three, the sacramental/symbolic model means that the family tends to become what the father is. A very effective Christian family counselor once told me that most of the problems in any marriage can be resolved by getting the man to do and act the right way. He was right because the man communicates a certain attitude and general lifestyle. The woman and the rest of the family mirror this back. We see this pattern in the lives of several characters in Scripture as negative traits of the father were communicated to the family.

(1) Jacob's father-in-law was Laban. Laban deceived Jacob several times. The most memorable was his substitution on the wedding night of his uglier daughter, Leah, for Rachel. When Jacob left Laban, Rachel deceived her husband by carrying out foreign gods. The father communicated deceit to the family, and the family bore out this characteristic.

(2) Cain and Lamech. The seventh generation from Cain was Lamech was a man of intense hatred, vengeance, and hostility. The Bible text says of Lamech, "if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen. 4:24). Cain's bitterness toward God and man was so effectively communicated that these characteristics appear down to the seventh generation.

(3) Samuel. We are told that Samuel was so busy doing the Lord's work that "he used to go annually on circuit to Bethel and Gilgal and Mizpah, and he judged Israel all the days of his life" (1 Sam. 7:16). Then in the very next chapter we are told that his sons did not walk after his ways (1 Sam,

8:3). Is it any wonder? Samuel was so busy judging Israel, that he was not at home with his children training them. Samuel had become somewhat like his predecessor Eli. But the point is that as Samuel was away from his sons, his sons went away from the covenant. This is a picture of what was happening in Israel at that time. The priesthood was not performing as it should, and so the people were following in suit.

(4) Lot and his family. In Thomas Sowell's *Knowledge and Decisions*, he talks about the difference between incremental and categorical decisions.³ Incremental decisions are those seemingly small decisions that are made which cumulatively amount to major impact on our lives. Categorical decisions are those once-in-a-lifetime decisions.

Lot was a man who made incremental decisions which amounted to major errors on his part. When he chose to go to the city of Sodom, we cannot say that this was a categorical mistake. Actually, Sodom was not all that bad when Lot went there. Incrementally, however, it set a trend in Lot's life to the point that even when the entire culture was perverted, and soon to be eradicated, Lot was reluctant to flee (Gen. 19:1ff.). Lot liked to live on the fringe of two worlds, the pagan and the believing. He chose that context instead of next to Abraham.

This was communicated to his children. His descendants were the Ammonites and Moabites (Gen. 19:36-38), two of the worst enemies of Israel. His daughters incrementally drifted away from the covenant. The corrupting effect was so great that the Ammonites and Moabites could not come back into the full Assembly of the Lord for ten generations (Deut. 23:3).

Therefore, the home becomes what the father communicates. A father should ask himself, "what mood and tone am I communicating to the home?" is the father moody, energetic, nervous, to name a few? If he is, then more than likely the home will be moody, energetic, or nervous.

On the other hand, redemption is greater than sin. We see in the case of Abigail (1 Sam. 25), that although her husband was a foolish and belligerent man, she redeemed the home. She prevented the sinful sacrament which her husband was communicating. She offered true bread to David. So, a wife can overcome even an unbelieving husband's sinful tendencies through redemption by showing forth the true sacrament of Christ.

Conclusion

Mary is a major figure of interest at Christmas time. But in 1984, some will no doubt place central emphasis on her. She is a symbol of femininity at a time when women are being placed in positions of leadership within and without the Church. With our model, we can rightly acknowledge that Mary is an image of the Bride of God, the Church, but resist placing her in a deified position above Christ.

Our approach allows us to see the role of the Church in giving Christ to the world. And, even underscore how the Church is to nurture, like a mother, its people who are called "the body of Christ." But the Church cannot be the High Priest, the Son of God. Furthermore, there is no getting around the fact that Jesus was a male. His gender was not intended to teach "male superiority," rather, He is God who is always distinguished by masculine gender.

Therefore, I have attempted to present a Biblical model for understanding the roles of man and woman, and some of the sticky problems that center around the role issue in Scripture. Certainly, what I have said is not the last word. But it seems to me that if we as orthodox Protestants believe the world is based on and held in place by the Word of God, then we must realize that communication is the basis of civilization. I have presented what I believe to be the ramifications of a communication model in the marital sphere primarily. Quite naturally, my discussion has spilled over into the more general functions of man and woman, and not enough time was spent here. Hopefully, the reader will work with this model, test it by Scripture, and if found to be Biblical, apply it more broadly.

3. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 26-28.