

**The Nuptial Analogy**  
**(Christ Relates to the Church as a Husband Relates to His**  
**Wife)**

**Used as the Theological Argument**  
**Against Women's Ordination**

The nuptial analogy of faith -- which relates Christ to the Church as a husband relates to his wife -- may appear appropriate. As an analogy, however, it remains seriously defective.<sup>1</sup>

In Thomistic terminology, the nuptial analogy falls within the realm of the analogy of intrinsic attribution.<sup>2</sup> According to Thomas,

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<sup>1</sup> See also Dorothy Irvin, "Omnis Analogia Claudet," in *Women Priests*, Arlene Swidler & Leonard Swidler (eds.), Paulist Press 1977, pp. 271-277.

<sup>2</sup> Through the analogy of intrinsic attribution (see below for the meaning of *intrinsic*), one first predicates a human virtue of God (for example: 'God is love'). Then, one negates the finite mode of one's experience of that quality (that is, 'God is love' but not in the way we, creatures, love, for God loves as the 'cause and infinite possessor of love' while, we, creatures, love as 'the effect of God's love and its finite possessor'). Consequently, one is thus *affirming* the attributed quality (love) as residing in God in a *supereminent way*, that is, beyond one's own conception of love; i.e., one is *affirming* God's way of loving as the source of all love that exists in 'created' love, and then some. *Summa Theologiae*, 1<sup>a</sup>, Questio 13, Art. 3, *Responsio, ad primum, ad secundum et ad tertium*, where Thomas distinguishes between (1) names attributed to God *metaphorically* such as 'God is my rock'; and (2) names attributed to God *absolutely*; or as in *Article 5*, names attributed to God *analogically*, such as 'God is good.' Absolute or *analogical* attributions express something about God *literally*, i.e., *talia proprie* whereas metaphorical attributions the express something about God "in such a way that part of the meaning of the word [denotes] the imperfect [finite] way in which the creature shares in the divine perfection" (*ad primum*) The English translations of Thomas' *Summa*

a physical quality can be attributed to a divine reality, not univocally nor equivocally, but analogically. Thus analogically 'a husband's love' can be attributed to Christ, and 'a wife's love' can be attributed to the Church as Mystery. Consequently, an analogical correlation can be made. For example: Christ loves the Church as a husband loves his wife and, vice versa, the Church loves Christ as a wife loves her husband. Thomas explains what he means by analogy.<sup>3</sup> "It is impossible," he writes,

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*Theologiae* are from the Blackfriars edition (NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company/London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), Vol. 3, 1<sup>a</sup> 12-13, Trans., Herbert McCabe. 3.

<sup>3</sup> The analogy of *intrinsic attribution* is to be distinguished from the *analogy of proportionality*, first proposed by Thomas in his *Commentarium in Librus Sententiarum* (ca. 1253-1255) and in his *De Veritate* (ca. 1256-1259). He then, in his *Summa Theologica* (ca. 1266-1273) as well as in his *Compendium Theologiae* (1272-1273), Thomas dropped the analogy of proportionality in favor of a more Aristotelian understanding of analogy; namely, the analogy of attribution. Regarding this issue, see Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), pp. 7-34. For example, in *De Veritate, Questio 23, Art. 7, Resp. 9* (quoted in *Somme Théologique* [Editions de la Revue des Jeunes, *Dieu*, I, *Tome Deuxième*, 1<sup>a</sup>, *Questions 12-17*, Paris: Desclée, 1926], p. 388), Thomas describes the *analogy of proportionality* as follows: "If the infinite and the finite cannot be expressed in proportion, they can be expressed in proportionality, since what the finite is to the finite, the infinite is to the infinite, that God is in the same relationship with regard to what concerns him as the creature [the finite is] with what is proper to it." [*The translation is mine.*] A Thomistic scholar pointed out to me that Thomas left behind the analogy of proportionality "when he realized that to get from the finite side of the equation to the infinite side, one needed to posit a univocal core, however slight -- unless one wanted to be totally agnostic. Such a univocal core, however, would compromise the

"to predicate anything univocally of God and creatures." The reason: "What exists simply and in a unified way in the cause [i.e., God] will be divided up and take various different forms in [the] effects [i.e., creation]."<sup>4</sup> Thomas explains further that neither can the attribution be equivocal, because of Romans 1, 20, where Paul writes: "The invisible things of God are made known by those things that are made". "We must therefore say", continues Thomas, "that words are used of God and creatures in an analogical way, that is, in accordance with a certain order (*proportion*) between them" (Latin: *proportionem*).<sup>5</sup> For example, 'God is good' signifies 'goodness in God' as the cause of goodness whereas 'a creature is good' signifies 'goodness in the

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'complete otherness' of God." See Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy* (quoted above.) Regarding Questions 12 & 13 in Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*, see also W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the 'Summa Theologiae'* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 81-95. On p. 91, n. 43, Hankey argues that regarding Question 13 in the *Summa*, McCabe (see *Appendix 3*, pp. 104-105 / Blackfriars, quoted above) is "more strongly and ambiguously negative about our knowledge of God than St. Thomas is...." Regarding the analogy of attribution, see also John S. Morreall, *Analogy and Talking about God: A Critique of the Thomistic Approach* (Washington, DC: University of America, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, 1<sup>a</sup>, *Questio 13*, *Art. 5*, 'Responsio.' Thus, for Thomas, the 'divided and multiple' (that is, we, creatures) can only know the 'one' (that is, God) 'dividedly and multiply' and, through analogy, we, creatures, know God as the 'one.' As 'one,' God is not known by creatures merely as a prime example (i.e., *extrinsically*), but as our absolute source (i.e., *intrinsically*).

<sup>5</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, 1<sup>a</sup>, *Questio 13*, *Art. 5*, 'Responsio'.

creature 'as the effect of God's goodness. The latter does not allow us to 'understand' the essence of God as he is in himself, [but rather to] understand God's essence as it is represented by the perfections of his creatures." "This is *how*," writes Thomas, "the words we use signify it [God's essence]."<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by the Scriptures, the 1976 Vatican Declaration against women's ordination (## 25 to 33)<sup>7</sup> appeals to the nuptial analogy as found (among several Christian Scriptures' writings) in the Pauline corpus (2 Cor. 11, 2, Eph. 5, Christ/husband and Church/wife) which, in turn, is based on the Hebrew Scriptures' nuptial analogy / God/husband and Israel/wife (#29). Then, in light of the Middle Age theology (32), Vatican Council II, the 1971 Synod of Bishops, and the Congregation's Declaration of 1973 (#26), the Curia again re-interprets the nuptial analogy. It equates the ordained priest (as he celebrates the Eucharist) with Christ. It

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<sup>6</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, 1<sup>a</sup> Questio 13, Art. 2, 'Ad Tertium. Thomas specifies what he means by God 'as cause.' "God is not good because he causes goodness but, rather, goodness flows from him because he is good. As Augustine says," Thomas adds, "Because God is good, we exist." *Summa Theologiae*, 1<sup>a</sup>, Questio 13, Art. 2, 'Responsio,' at the end, just before *Ad primum*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Inter insigniores* (October 15, 1976) in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 69 (February 28, 1977), pp. 96-116. Eng. Trans.: *Vatican Declaration: Women in the Ministerial Priesthood*, in *Origins* 6 (February 3, 1977). A text of the *Declaration* is also found in Swidler, eds., *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, pp. 37-47. In what follows, reference to the *Declaration* will be made to the *Origins* version.

asserts that, in the Eucharist, the priest does not act in *persona propria* (in his own name), but in *persona Christi* ("taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his own image (Christ's), when he (the priest) pronounces the words of consecration." And since factually, the Incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex, for the consecration 'to happen,' the ordained priest must bear a 'natural resemblance' with Christ (#27). Therefore, he must be male. Hence, in the Declaration, we now find *an amended analogy of attribution*: i.e., priest=Christ/husband. To the priest=Christ is attributed a husband's quality: 'maleness,' that is, 'the natural resemblance' with Christ, which -- according to the Declaration -- would not exist in the celebration of the Eucharist "if the role of Christ were not taken by a man" (#27).<sup>8</sup>

It is here that the Declaration's interpretation of the spousal analogy of faith collapses: a husband's 'maleness' is attributed to

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<sup>8</sup> My argumentation sets Thomas against Thomas. The *Declaration* refers to Thomas' understanding of sacramental signs. It states: "'Sacramental signs,' says Saint Thomas, 'represent what they signify by natural resemblance'" (#27), an argument which Thomas uses to reject the ordination of women. See *Declaration*, notes 18 and 19, which refer to Thomas' *IV Sententiae., dist. 25, q. 2, art. 1, quaestiuncula 1<sup>a</sup> ad 4<sup>um</sup> & 1<sup>a</sup>, corp*). On Thomas and other medieval masters' view regarding women's ordination, see Francine Cardman, *Non Conclusive Arguments: Therefore, Non-Conclusion*; George Tavard, *The Scholastic Doctrine* and Christopher Kiesling, *Aquinas on Persons' Representation in Sacraments*. (These articles are in Swidler, *Women Priests*, pp. 92- 98, 99-106, & 253-257 respectively.)

Christ not analogically but univocally, and Christ is sexualized.<sup>9</sup> He has a penis, and so must have all 'ordained' priests. Consequently, in the nuptial analogy, if 'maleness' (rather than 'being human') is predicated of Christ (through an analogy of attribution) -- as the Declaration does -- and if the ordained priest must naturally (physically) resemble Christ, then, for the Curia in

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<sup>9</sup> Even the Council of Chalcedon regarding Christ's humanity did not sexualize Christ. About Christ's humanity, the issue intended directly by Chalcedon was that Jesus' human nature is genuinely and completely human. The Greek expression *anthropos* (ἄνθρωπος / Latin: *homo*) has a generic meaning, that of 'human being,' not that 'of being male.' See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, I* ("The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition") [100-600] (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 263-264. According to Pelikan, the Council states: "We confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ [that he is] the same perfect in godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a reasonable soul and body; homoousios with the Father in godhead, and the same homoousios

[ὁμοούσιος / *same substance*] with us in manhood" Even though 'man' is the expression used by Pelikan to translate *anthropos*/ἄνθρωπος/*homo*, contextually, it remains that in Chalcedon, 'man' means 'human,' and not 'male' *per se* (which is *ανηρ* in Greek), the point being that Christ saves what he has assumed. Since he has assumed a nature that is human, then he saves all that is human, females and males. (There are controversies about these two Greek words (ἄνθρωπος [humankind] and ανηρ [male/man] as to their respective meanings in the Greek language. See, for example, [www.hellpage.com/greek%20aner.htm](http://www.hellpage.com/greek%20aner.htm) "Can Greek *aner* [ανηρ/man] mean "person"?"; "The Big Question: Should the Bible Be Politically Correct?" [debate between Scott Munger, V.P. of translation at the *International Bible Society* and Wayne Grudem, from the *Phoenix Seminary*, see <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0201/29/ltm.12.html>; and Michael D. Marlowe, "The Ambiguity of 'Anthropos'," see <http://www.bible-researcher.com/anthropos.html>.

its *Declaration*, were a woman priest to preside at the Eucharist, an 'unacceptable' relationship would arise; namely, that of a female/female (lesbian) relationship rather than that of a male/female (heterosexual) relationship, especially at Mass (the sacrament of the Alliance). The 'analogy' would then be that of *Christ/wife* (not of Christ/husband) and of *Church/wife*. In other words, there would exist 'on both sides of the altar' a 'female' signification. In the Eucharist (the Church's celebration of its wedding with Christ), the *Church/wife* would be sealing a lesbian relationship with the Christ/wife.

It remains, however, that lesbianism becomes an issue for the Curia in its *Declaration* only because the analogy as the Curia uses it, is flawed. By insisting that the priest must have a 'natural resemblance' with Christ (#27), that is, that the priest must be male, the Declaration asserts that Christ as husband relates to the Church in a *physical* and *univocal* sense rather than in a *symbolic* and *analogical* sense. It should be noted, however, that, in the *Declaration*, the *Church as wife* continues to relate to Christ in a symbolic and analogical sense, for as wife, the Church includes *both men and women* (##28-29). The *Declaration* states: "It is through this Scriptural language [Christ is the Bridegroom, the Church is His Bride, whom He loves] which is all interwoven

with symbols and which affects man and woman, that there is revealed to us the mystery of God and Christ....” (#29)

Analogically, it appears that in the *Declaration*, what is 'interwoven' are physical and symbolic apples.<sup>10</sup> For one thing, it seems to me that, theologically, the 'ordained' priesthood should have nothing to do with penises. Neither with vaginas. And, furthermore, biblically, with regard to the nuptial analogy, gender attribution, that is, who is husband? who is wife? Christ or the Church? is not only theologically irrelevant but also simply ludicrous. On all counts, theologically and biblically, gender attribution leads to absurdity.

During the past two decades, theologians of liberation have taught Christians that not only praxis needs to be liberated by God's Word<sup>11</sup> but also that God's Word needs to be liberated by praxis.<sup>12</sup> I therefore suggest that at the heart of the biblical

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<sup>10</sup> See also, Sonya A. Quitslung, "In the Image of Christ," in Swidler, *Women Priests*, pp. 260-270.

<sup>11</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1973), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, "The Hermeneutic Circle," *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1976), pp. 7-38. (Regarding the topic of women's ordination, see also Richard J. Beauchesne, "EXPLORATIONS AND RESPONSES: Scriptural/Theological Argument Against Women's Ordination (Simply Stated), and Responses," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 33:1, 1993, pp. 107-114.)



spousal analogy lies an unconditional love, trust and mutuality, which, according to Thomas, are analogical, not univocal nor equivocal. Such an unconditioned gift can exist between Christ and the Church as well as between two spouses, not only as husband and wife but also as spouses *simpliciter*. Consequently, any relationship of a spousal nature -- including that between male and male and between female and female -- is not to be excluded from the biblical nuptial analogy nor from its most profound, religious, sacramental and analogous meaning. The insistence on gender attribution -- due to homophobic preoccupations -- serves not only to still the ecclesial and societal establishments' utter abhorrence of physical male/male and female/female depth-relationships but also to normalize ecclesial and societal gender-related constructs such as demonstrated in the traditional and patriarchal models of the male domination/female submission kinds.

According to the *Declaration*, as a divine/a-historical legacy, the 'apostolic charge' (i.e., ordination) must remain male and must exclude females as exclusively proposed by the Magisterium. Church doctrine 'happens' outside of the theological endeavor, not within it and, as a result, the 'husband' of the Church, that is, 'the priest=Christ' amended analogy, means that one can be an ordained priest only if one is physically a man, not

physically a woman in spite of the fact that, as 'wife,' the Church analogically and symbolically includes both physical females and physical males.