

**THE FREEDOM OF
CHRISTIAN WOMANHOOD**

A Response to Feminism

Diane Woerner
July 1978

I am female because God decided I would be. I believe God made me a woman because He knew that it would best serve His purposes, that it would be best for me, and that it would be best for those whose lives are affected by mine. The main impetus behind the feminist movement, as I perceive it, is that women need to be glad they are women. For the Christian woman especially this is true, because she must be able with her innermost heart to confront God as One who loves and understands her, and who makes no mistakes.

Two energies characterize the feminist movement, one negative, the other positive. First, there is great concern to correct the apparent imbalance in our society which favors the masculine. Some feminists see this imbalance as conspiracy, others as accident, but all see it as injustice. The inverse, positive face of feminism is the quest for valuable female identity. To a certain extent, of course, feminist unrest reflects the larger malaise that seems to increasingly characterize modern Western society. A desire for freedom from oppressive forces, a search for personal significance, the need to identify a rationale for why things are as they are (and aren't as we sense they should be)—these and other concerns occupy all our minds with varying levels of urgency.

Yet feminism can in no way be reduced to just another “quest for truth.” Feminist thinkers (male as well as female) have perceived that the questions related to womanhood have a number of facets that do not apply to other categories of inquiry. The complexities and mysteries of human sexuality require special understandings, and permit as well unique distortions of vision, for none of us can be completely objective. In other words, there is no third party to adjudicate between women and men. This non-objectivity is further complicated by the multiplicity of human dimensions wherein sexual identity “matters,” including physical, psychological, political, social, economic, aesthetic, moral and religious contexts. Feminism is not just a call for equal votes or equal pay—or even equal rights or equal status. Rather, its questions and claims involve all aspects of human relatedness and meaningfulness.

After casting the feminist phenomenon in such broad terms, we must immediately be reminded that it also includes the very, very specific. Most questions about womanhood arise in the everyday contexts of life. “Do I have to clean the house because I am the wife?” “Because I *can* have children, does that mean I’m supposed to?” “If I don’t get married, is something wrong with me?” “I’m the husband—I’ll decide.” “You can’t do that. You’re a *girl*.” For many women, entrance into the feminist movement begins as simply as this. In our freedom-and-rights conscious society, it takes very little time for a girl or woman to realize that many aspects of life come in “his” and “hers,” and that all too often “hers” seems the less desirable slice. Somewhat deeper reflection reveals that the pie is usually cut and distributed by a male hierarchy, be it fathers or husbands, psychologists or historians, or political or clerical leaders. And even deeper probings point to a ponderous if nebulous “This is so because it should be so” basis upon which all sexual distinctions are grounded.

Such reflections as these indeed comprise a major portion of feminist literature. And once a problem is identified (in this case, that there may be major flaws in our ideas about womanhood), then the logical sequence is to inquire as to the source of error prior to suggesting solutions or changes. However, before we examine some of the frequently identified bases for discrimination against women, let us look a little more closely at the nature of the problem itself.

One excellent starting point is the now classic book sometimes credited with “igniting” the contemporary Woman’s Liberation Movement, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. Drawing largely from the testimonies of middle-class American housewives, she points to a multi-faceted frustration that apparently characterizes the average homemaker’s existence, and calls it “the problem that has no name.” These women are bored, restless, depressed, anxious about their identity, unable to make decisions, intellectually stifled, and (as Friedan terms it) functionally “infantalized.”¹ She describes a “mystique” that is deeply imbedded in our culture which insists that feminine fulfillment is realized only through “sexual passivity, male domination and nurturing maternal love.”² Beyond her diametric disagreement with such a premise, she argues that its net effect is a denial of female intelligence and an enforced isolation of women from the world outside the home. In addition, a woman who is told by the mystique to realize her primary fulfillment in her children often cripples them seriously through an emotional over-investment of herself in their lives.³

With the impetus given by this book, it was only a short time before feminists began to draw larger pictures of female oppression. History provided immediate documentation of even more drastic discrimination against women, who in many cultures and eras were sold as property, worshipped as sensuous but mindless deities, or burned as witches. Christian feminism confronted not only the scriptural (especially Old Testament) restrictions against women, but also the continued pronouncements of the church fathers concerning the subordinate status of women.⁴ At first the primary focus of the feminists’ attention was on what women had to do or what they could not do. But gradually the more subtle ramifications of sexual structurings surfaced, such as the implied assumption that male is normal (i.e., that men are the norm and women are defined in relation to them),⁵ and the heavy masculinization of English language patterns.

Faced with questions that seemed obvious when formulated but which for some reason appeared to have gone unasked for years, feminists began to look for the reasons for female oppression. An initial observation that culture itself, and to a large extent the religious elements within that culture, had encouraged these social structures and attitudes, did not in itself provide clues to the why’s, even though it explained many of the how’s. The inquiry then moved in two basic directions—one backward historically, the other inward. If a society’s religious or cultural heritage contains sexual orderings, from whence did they come? And if a society such as ours shakes itself free of so many of its religious trappings, why then do these modes of relationship continue so forcefully?

Addressing first the question of why the mystique continues, the standard answers are usually some casting of functionalism. Women are told they should act this way because it contributes to the stability of society, because it fulfills the needs of men, or because it is good for the women themselves. The second item is probably most often noted; in fact many feminists are convinced that men are the only real beneficiaries of the mystique, and even if men didn’t start it, they are responsible for its endurance. These feminists react with varying combinations of rejection, aggression, bitterness, condescension, and anger at men-in-general who have “used” women (in many senses of the word) for their own gain.

Nonetheless, much of the reason the mystique prevails is many women themselves have chosen to believe it. Betty Friedan observes that post-war American women seemed to embrace the mystique strongly (despite the recent suffrage movement) because the home and family held immense appeal against the loneliness, fear, and vulnerability of the war years.⁶ Any ordering becomes attractive when the alternative risks and uncertainties loom too large, despite the flaws that ordering may have. Another benefit to women within the traditional system is, simply, that women find happy men easier to live

with. Numerous feminists have commented on the difficulties inherent in speaking against the *status quo*, not the least being rejection by their male associates. Women who compete vocationally with men in established “male territory” frequently encounter a qualitatively different sort of resistance than the usual job competitions. It is only obvious that, to many women, acceptance of what men want or allow is the easier route.

Still, the deeper question remains: how did it all get started this way? Was there some grand prehistoric battle of the sexes wherein men, by might or by chance, gained the upper hand and set out to make women their vassals? Those who would posit the yet unproven prehistoric matriarchal societies must include in their assumptions some fashion of *coup d’etat* upon which historical patriarchies were built. Or is there rather a force (or set of forces), built into the very pattern of our existence, that compels men to dominate even the women they love?

It is this latter course of conjecture that in fact most feminists pursue. For example, Rosemary Reuther proposes:

The domination of women is rooted in the fundamental schism and alienation in the male psyche that emerged in the course of the evolution of the mind as a self-conscious and reflective ego.⁷

Upon this hypothetical and obscure psychological base she constructs her vision of the dualisms and distortions in our culture against which she calls women forcibly to rebel. However, a much more tangible (and therefore more persuasive) understanding of the sources of sexual structuring is offered in Elizabeth Janeway’s *Man’s World, Woman’s Place*. Janeway gives careful expression to the increasingly popular framework of interpretation that sees cultural patterns as the product of ancient and powerful myths. “Myth” in this context is a belief which is false in reality, but which nonetheless is faithful to and useful to human yearnings and fears. Myths are not so much stated as they are felt, although numerous cultural expressions can be identified, such as those Janeway takes to task: “It’s a man’s world” and “A woman’s place is in the home.”

While a thorough survey of her book is not possible here, it will be helpful to review the major myths to which she credits the development of our contemporary sexual attitudes. First, she suggests that such notions as “a woman’s place is in the home” reflect the inner cravings of both men and women for a paradise past, embodied in the Myth of the Golden Age.⁸ Whether there was such an age historically, or whether we are merely seeking fetal or infantile comfort and security—the longing to “return to” that comfort, according to Janeway, is the inner impetus for the glorification of the home and the insistence that women (who are, after all, our mothers) stay there to nurture and serve us in it.

Two other myths, in some ways even more basic than the Myth of the Golden Age, operate as a kind of tandem force in the historical male psyche to produce structures and attitudes that are oppressive toward women. These are the Myth of Female Weakness and the Myth of Female Power. Janeway maintains that the Myth of Female Power is in fact the older of the two, deriving from the exclusive and awesome power of women to give birth, from the power of woman over man resulting from his sexual needs, and from man’s experience of the authority and powers of his own mother. While there is of course a measure of truth in all these powers, the myth obtains when men project such female powers into the nature of woman herself, viewing her as threatening and oppressive. Their subconscious self-protective reactions are thus the source of the oppressive forms which *they* direct toward women.⁹

In some respects, the Myth of Female Weakness can be seen as a derivative of the power myth. While drawing from the concrete realities of the relatively lesser physical strength of women, from their sexual vulnerability, and from their need to be protected especially during pregnancy, the Myth of Female Weakness also appears to gain momentum via its service to the male need for defense against female power. Janeway notes that this myth of weakness also has a strong attractiveness to women themselves, who often feel that it is in their best interest for men to protect and defer to them.¹⁰

Nonetheless, it is the consensus of feminism that, despite the apparent usefulness of myths, these deeply imbedded cultural attitudes are in fact directly responsible for the inability of women today to find personal fulfillment. It is one thing to say that most women need protecting; it is another to say that all women must stay at home. The first statement is a realistic assessment of reality in most cultures; the second is an emotional assertion that carries with it an externally binding authority from which neither women nor men can be freed. And it is precisely this *binding* nature of myths and mystiques that feminists most object to, for fulfillment is understood by them to be predicated on personal freedom of choice.

It is apparent in these and other writings that the elimination of oppressive structures and values and the facilitation of personal fulfillment are feminism's two principal objectives, and therefore the underlying criteria for the aptness and legitimacy of the specific actions they take. Much of the seeming diversity between various groups of feminists stems not from a disparity in what they seek, but rather from disagreement on how their goals might be reached. For instance, some feminists would say that the political, economic, social and even language structures of our society are the true locus of oppression and should be the specific object of attention. They advocate such things as equal rights legislation, provision of child care facilities, and equal attention to female achievement in educational programs. They argue that men's careers should not be predicated on their having a traditional wife-at-home, but rather husbands and wives should divide the in-home and out-of-home aspects of their lives evenly. They insist that those contexts in our culture which feature women as sex objects should be forced to change.

However, the primary attention of many feminists is directed not toward external restructuring but rather toward individual and corporate ideological changes, out of which new structures should eventually proceed. These ideological changes are usually developed through a process that those in the movement call "consciousness raising." Convinced that the real enemy is ignorance, many feminist groups spend the greater portion of their energies working to expose the myths and mystiques that they believe stifle the freedoms of both men and women. Meeting with small groups of housewives, for example, they draw each woman into close examination of her personal frustrations and desires. In a majority of cases, according to feminists, a woman will reach a point of enlightenment where she realizes that her personal unhappiness is shared by countless others, that it is not her fault but the fault of a larger process built into the culture itself, and that it is not inevitable but can be overcome.

This, then, is the life-blood of the movement: the collective conviction that there may be an answer to our unhappiness as women, and ultimately our unhappiness as a society, through the dismantling and radical rebuilding of those very forms of human sexual self-understanding and sexual relatedness that we had assumed were unassailable.

II

Are they right? As Christians we need to know if in fact feminism does speak truth, even in part, to women who feel the confusion and discontent and personal emptiness. Let us look, then, at the nature of the arguments these women use, considering their methods, their solutions, and perhaps most importantly, the attitudes of the women themselves that are implicit in the arguments. For if feminists *have* discovered new truths about womanhood, then it is fair to expect that in a partial but significant fashion we would be able to discern a new healthiness, if not yet in their societies, at least in the individuals themselves.

One initial observation is that for many feminists one predominant criterion appears to govern their evaluations of truthfulness. For them, a principle is true if its application facilitates personal freedom. This statement is more often expressed conversely: that which interferes with freedom must be false. Similarly, for them, something is *good* insofar as it avoids oppressive restrictions on individual expression or creativity. The first point to emphasize, then, in a discussion of feminism's methods of argumentation is that in their apparent adherence to this single definitive criterion, the feminists are bypassing for the most part other traditional meanings of goodness and truth that might be applied objectively against their arguments. Goodness (for them) is not necessarily that which benefits the most people. Truth is not that which reflects most clearly the experiences of all people. Nor are goodness and truth expected to stand in reference to any divinely decreed or humanly elected standards.

Deeper reflection reveals that behind the above stated criterion (i.e., that goodness and truth lie in those policies or forces which free individuals) is the assumption that goodness and truth are actually located in the individual herself. If it is good to free an individual, then that freed individual must inevitably in her freedom produce good—or rather, that which she produces is (by definition) good. Anyone who is truly a feminist learns to say “I am good,” “I am true.” Of course, feminists are not the only ones who say these things, or who judge reality from the ground of their own experience of themselves. But the point here is that in a real way feminists have absolved themselves of any criticisms that we who would judge their efforts by other standards might advance. On their terms alone, their case holds. The question remains nonetheless whether feminists have a right to demand that the world accept their terms, or put another way, whether their chosen view of reality has anything to offer the rest of us.

Since the traditional criteria of truth and goodness are more productive for our purposes of evaluation, we shall set aside the strictly personal dimensions of feminism and judge it from the wider perspective of its benefits to society and its conformity to general human experience, as well as by the internal consistency of its efforts. For in fact most feminists take pains to meet these additional criteria, in part because they know that their success as a social movement requires it of them, and, in many cases, because they are unaware (or don't believe) that there will be any conflict between the personal and the social, once all “distortions” are removed. Even such extreme feminists as Mary Daly, who acknowledges a radical conflict between true personal freedom and society as it is today, expresses faith that somehow, someday, we will all live happily in some brave new world.

That feminism allows itself to be governed by one value, freedom, is its own choice. Feminists deceive themselves, however, if they presume that from their stance of personal freedom they are also exhibiting open-mindedness. Our second observation regarding feminist argumentation is that it permits a curious double standard to operate. Social conditioning, for example, is considered evil when it teaches children traditional sex roles. Yet to give girls guns and boys dolls would not be viewed as harmful but as

freeing. More subtly, women are encouraged to seek personal fulfillment through intellectual, or, say, artistic expression; yet those who deliberately choose to tend children are marked as trapped and to be pitied. The choices feminism permits are not in fact open.

Sheila Collins comments concerning patriarchalism, "Because it is only one way of looking at reality, it is therefore a false way."¹¹ Whether or not her indictment is valid, it could as easily be applied to feminism. Arianna Stassinopoulous, in her book *The Female Woman*, identifies some revealing gaps in the selection of phenomena feminism analyzes in its quest to prove male manipulations of our culture. For example, statistics indicate that young girls have superior verbal aptitudes, while boys excel in non-verbal skills. And, since verbal abilities are clearly esteemed in our society, feminism is confronted with

the uncomfortable alternative of either admitting that education, culture and society discriminate in favor of women or conceding that this key difference in intellectual abilities is innate.¹²

She later notes a similar difficulty in the statistical fact of women's greater longevity.

If [female longevity] is the result of innate differences between the sexes, the Women's Lib thesis that all sex differences are culturally determined collapses; if it is the result of environmental factors, then men are more harshly treated than women and it is their myth of the downtrodden woman that collapses.¹³

And yet, in the face of such contradictions, feminism displays a singular confidence that it alone bears truth. This confidence carries through when we consider some of the other licenses feminists grant themselves. For example, they show little hesitation to be condescending, selfish or vindictive when their cause requires it, although they would be quick to criticize this in others.

There is a kind of nihilism about the "liberated." Their general attitude is that all moral issues will effortlessly disappear once the collective mystic state of liberation has been achieved: I am contributing to the success of the venture of Liberation—that is my debt to humanity paid. I need not bother to behave morally in other ways, and in any case these ways are about to disappear.¹⁴

There is sad irony that those groups (of whatever sort) who take it upon themselves to espouse universal liberation far too often fall into one or another form of elitism. Either they elevate the unfree (the oppressed) to a position that entails justified scorn of the oppressor, or else they select one value or characteristic, of which the oppressed have presumably been deprived, and glorify it to the discredit of other values. Feminism is guilty on both counts. Not that they would explicitly exalt women above men. Yet they in fact allow women, or at least themselves as "authentic" women, such prerogatives as have already been discussed, along with sanction to demand from men whatever retributions might be deemed their due, without regard for the needs or feelings of these men. If "history has been the holocaust of women," as Rosemary Reuther puts it,¹⁵ is there any improvement in reversing roles? Sheila Collins speaks of a "vision of wholeness and unity,"¹⁶ yet her absorption with the potentials of sisterhood betrays a significant disinterest in the nature or meaning of brotherhood, and little more interest in brother-and-sisterhood.

This myopic tendency which sees woman as victim and man as privileged and merciless does little to enhance feminism's credibility. Mary Daly claims that history reveals a "universal misogyny," based on men's fear of women, which is expressed "sometimes as loathing, sometimes as belittling ridicule,

sometimes as patronizing contempt.”¹⁷ Again, she represents an extreme position, but to a lesser degree many feminists embrace the attitude that men have all the good things in life and seek to withhold them from women. These “good things” cannot be material goods, for (in our society at least) women enjoy as much material ownership as men. No, the treasures that women seek are the treasures of personal fulfillment, meaningfulness and self-esteem. And for some hard-to-determine reason, feminists are convinced not only that men have these treasures, but that they also have the power to withhold them from women.

It may appear strange that I should describe this attitude as elitist, but in one respect at least I think it is justified. Elitism exists whenever any group gives itself rights over another because of its superior merit. The merit of women, to judge from their own arguments, lies precisely in their position of assumed victimization. That they themselves might victimize (or have in fact victimized) other groups does not negate this “merit.” And, based on this unusual justification, feminists feel themselves rightfully superior to the men who have victimized them. Because they (the women) haven’t been treated fairly, men also need not be. Thus the man who would act courteously toward a woman may as justly be castigated as chauvinistic as the discourteous man is deemed rude. His intentions are not consulted—they are assumed. Similarly, a man whose career is not fulfilling is summarily ignored; after all, feminism knows that it’s a man’s world and that men choose freely the better portions of life. Again, the actual male perspective is not considered.

The other face of feminist elitism shows itself, oddly enough, against women themselves. For if we are to accept feminism’s estimation of things, then the vast majority of women must be held in contempt for their failure to participate in the new freedoms. This is not to say that most women have seen the freedoms and deliberately rejected them. Rather, for a great multitude of women, these freedoms are basically unattainable. The great secret to fulfillment, say many if not most feminists, lies in the freedom to be intellectually and creatively expressive. What the feminists fail to realize is that fulfillment in these areas comes, to a large extent, only to the most intelligent or the most talented. While success in being a wife or mother can feasibly be reached by nearly all women, intellectual and creative success (especially in the scientific, artistic, commercial, or political fields often lauded by feminism) can at best be known by only a certain portion of women, and to only a relative degree.¹⁸

A telling result was experienced in the kibbutz experimental communities. These communities began as a context where men and women would share tasks and responsibilities equally. However, as it happened, traditionally “masculine” roles were given more prestige, and the women who chose (or were by their natures forced to select) the lower rank occupations fell to lesser esteem than they had held when role divisions were culturally permitted.¹⁹ Yet the obvious alternative, to raise the status of “feminine” occupations, is one that for some reason feminism firmly refuses to take.

We have thus far discovered within the dynamics of feminism certain key flaws: the feminists’ unbalanced selection of criteria and data that favor their purposes; their demand for justice from men that demonstrates little or no reciprocal understanding or tolerance; their implicit or explicit veneration of scientific or business prowess, the effects of which are inevitably oppressive to the majority of people, male or female. The next item may or may not be a flaw, but it is surely a weakness, and that is that feminism entails an unvindicated faith in its own *modus operandi* and its future results.

We mentioned in chapter one the two fronts of feminist activity: socio-political correction of sexist forms in government, education, etc.; and the individual processes of enlightenment whereby

supposedly conditioned responses are exposed and eradicated. It is fair to say that in both endeavors feminism has enjoyed a measure of success. Nationally, we are all much more aware of sexism than we were ten years ago, and (for the most part) we are attempting to alter the inequities. But behind their campaign for these external changes, what ultimately motivates feminism is a personal, even spiritual longing for meaningfulness. And it is in this context that feminists face and fail to answer their most significant challenge: the identification of how women (and humans in general) are to find personal meaning and fulfillment, and what form that fulfilled existence will take.

Not that many feminists would acknowledge this failure. Mary Daly speaks of the “compelling power” of feminism “deriving from its concreteness and specificity.”

It speaks precisely out of and to the experience of the sexually oppressed and has an awakening force that is emotional, intellectual, and moral. It changes the fabric of lives, affecting also the consciousness of the men related to the women whose consciousness it is changing.²⁰

Yet these are changes that are relative to *past* forms. Feminism throws off the old with emphatic thoroughness. It is specific in its expression of what it *isn't*. But as we seek to understand what it *is*, we encounter significant unspecificity.

As has often been noted, the key focus for most feminist attention has been the pursuit of personal freedom. And while feminists can point to definite laws or social structures that they believe interfere with personal freedom, most of them realize that the deeper power which grants or withholds freedom lies in the individual herself. Thus Mary Daly speaks of “contagious freedom”²¹—a freedom that spreads from one person to the next presumably in the way that courage can be contagious. I am free when I recognize and exercise my power to be myself. What feminists fail to acknowledge, however, is the fact that freedom is not identical with meaningfulness. Personal liberty may be the prerequisite condition for meaningfulness, but it is not itself the content of fulfillment. Here then is the great unspoken, unclarified, and unjustified assumption of feminism—that somehow out of each free individual will arise the meaningfulness that will transcend all previously held definitions of value, that will satisfy each, and thereby unify all.

Mary Daly is right—feminism does have power. But its power is a flame that feeds on past error and injustice, fanned by the winds of anger and rebellion. Were the wrongs to be righted, the flame would of necessity die, and the comradeship based on shared grievances would be forced to dissipate. That anything positive would be left can only be hoped for—it is not integral to the nature of feminism. This is evidenced in that, despite their optimism, feminists don't know how the liberated future will appear.

What women might be like, how we would symbolize the polarities of self and other, thinking and feeling, activity and receptivity outside the traditions of male domination is something that we cannot know until a nonsexist society is created where women are recognized as full human persons, with a right to develop their potency not only for others, but for their own self-fulfillment. . . . They must reconstitute all the terms of the process, so that all relations within the self and between the self and others assumes a new content and a new mode of interaction. Feminism is truly a venture into a *terra incognita*.²²

III

There are yet other challenges to feminism that merit our attention. One of the most erudite and thus most formidable confrontations with feminism's disregard for scientific and sociological data is found in Steven Goldberg's *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*. After a thorough examination of anthropological investigations into societal variations (including those examples cited by feminists), Goldberg concludes that

... in every society males attain the high-status (non-maternal) roles and positions and perform the high-status tasks, whatever those tasks are.²³

Then, drawing again from his careful perusal of a wide range of biological research relevant to the issue, Goldberg states:

... those individuals whose male anatomy leads to a social identification as "male" have hormonal systems which generate a greater capacity for "aggression" . . . than those individuals whose female anatomy leads to a social identification as "female" and . . . socialization and institutions conform to the reality of hormonal sexual differentiation and to the statistical reality of the "aggression advantage" which males derive from their hormonal systems.*²⁴

From these observations Goldberg considers himself justified in his belief in the universality of male dominance as a social norm. He defines "male dominance" as

the feeling acknowledged by the emotions of both men and women that the woman's will is somehow subordinate to the male's and that general authority in dyadic and familial relationships, in whatever terms a particular society defines authority, ultimately resides in the male.²⁵

While he concedes that science does not permit "deductive conclusiveness," he argues that his position is "infinitely more probable" than that of the environmentalist who chooses to interpret human patterns of relationship as arbitrarily imposed by societies.²⁶

What Goldberg's research brings us to is the interesting possibility that feminism itself may be engaged in modern day myth-making. In chapter one we defined "myth" as a belief which is false in reality, but which nonetheless is faithful to and useful to human yearnings. If Goldberg is right, then much of what feminism teaches (e.g., the essential sameness of the sexes) may indeed qualify as myth. Elizabeth Janeway discusses several additional characteristics of myths, and these too seem suggestively applicable to the dynamics of feminism.

Myth is born out of psychological drives. What we do not have, that is what we need; and that is what we present to ourselves as desirable and, finally, as "right." In this way does the statement, "I want this!" become "I have the right to it!" We strengthen this mythic structure by projecting

* Extensive recapitulation of these discussions is not possible here, but anyone acquainted with feminist literature can attest to its dearth of scientific documentation, and thus would do well to consult a book such as Goldberg's if the question of feminism's fidelity to science or anthropology is of concern – which presumably it should be.

our fears out onto the world, whence they return as threats. So the fear that we may not get what we want, even if we have a right to it, becomes a threat to our desires and thus a justification for our acting against those we fear will deny our needs. Myth opposes belief to facts in order to change the facts, or at least to obscure them.²⁷

... myths are plausible to many. They gain strength from the connection that they supply to their believers, the shared desires, the joint wishful thinking that backs up one person's fantasies with another's, with those of a like-minded group. They endure because they offer hope, because they justify resentments, but perhaps most of all because they provide a bond of common feeling.²⁸

It is characteristic of mythic action to be inappropriate to the end it desires to achieve.²⁹

What, then, are the desires of feminists, the urgency of which might even drive them to a dismissal of reality? They have told us, repeatedly, that what they seek is the freedom, the personal control of their own lives, that would enable them to discover and express the creative potential within themselves in whatever fashion they considered most fulfilling. While our response to these stated desires will be continued throughout this paper, we need at this point to examine whether in fact that is all there is to what motivates feminism.

Journalist Midge Decter addresses this question directly in her book *The New Chastity and Other Arguments Against Women's Liberation*. In four chapters, discussing housework, sexual relationships, marriage and motherhood, she summarizes (often using the feminists' own language) the major areas of specific injustice to which feminism objects. She then observes that rather than increasing restrictions on women, our culture has radically removed most of the limitations that were taken for granted by our mothers. The work of housekeeping is all but eliminated through gadgetry and professional assistance, and even where it still exists (as Betty Friedan notes) the problem is usually not overwork but boredom. Careers are an open option for most women today. In sexual matters, birth control and the sanctioning by society of nearly all forms of behavior again have granted the modern woman almost limitless choice. Similarly, the increasing respectability of divorce and voluntary childlessness, both strongly disapproved of a generation ago, gives women freedom to fashion their lives almost entirely at will.

All of which is acknowledged by feminists. What has *not* occurred to them, apparently, is that the "problem that has no name," the overriding dissatisfaction of women with their lives, the urgency they feel for self-expression by which they can assure themselves of identity—these have arisen *concurrently with* the new freedoms. In the instance of housework, for example, Midge Decter suggests that

... the housewife's complaint does not arise from the source ascribed to it by *The Feminine Mystique*, that housekeeping calls forth too little of her nature as an autonomous, willing being, but that on the contrary it calls forth too much.³⁰

Modern homemaking entails a daily array of choices, which, in microcosm, force a woman to decide innumerable details about her own identity, as efficient, creative, tidy, stylish, etc.

Her fatigue, her irritability, arise then not from a feeling that she is losing her sense of self but that she is coming too unbearably close to a head-on confrontation with it.³¹

With the matter of careers, feminism has always claimed that it is the male's freedom to work that they covet. A more honest assessment might reveal that, since for most men not to work is *not* an option, what in fact women envy is "his blanket, unwilling, unthinking entailment in necessity."³² Feminists want the right to careers, but chances are they would balk if careers were forced upon them (a possibility which nonetheless may soon become a reality in our inflated economy). Still, it is in the security of knowing the importance of his wages, even apart from other rewards, that a man finds meaningfulness. And, if women were honest, it may well be a security that they wish were their own.

The undercurrents involved with women's pursuit of careers go deeper however. Feminist demands for equal employment especially in top-level "male" careers evokes the curious phenomenon that in fact an equal number of women do not show interest in, or willingness to train for, these occupations. The recourse of feminism is to claim that such disinterest is socially conditioned, or that males have deliberately crippled women intellectually. However, another explanation might even more easily apply: simply, most women would rather avoid the responsibilities, demands, and potential failures that these careers entail.

Yet, even if feminists are right, and women have been stunted solely through the mistreatment of society, there appears little tendency in feminism to encourage the women *themselves* to change. As Miss Decter notes,

[The liberator's] view of changing the present condition of women involves instead an alteration of all the present arrangements of society ... They do not desire to change places with the ruling class but rather to live without reference to a ruling class. They do not desire power for themselves but rather a society in which no one has power. They do not even desire a freer society, one that affords them a larger and wider variety of opportunity, but rather one in which the very terms "freedom" and "opportunity" will be redefined so as to conform with their desires.³³

Parallel insights can be found in the questions of sexuality, marriage and childbearing. In each case, women seem basically unhappy, not with the freedoms, but with the responsibilities these freedoms bring with them. Whereas before society had taught a woman to take for granted that she would marry and bear children, now it is her freely chosen act, voluntarily committing her to the risks these intimacies and interdependences bring with them. Thus, what appears to be freedom is actually an almost unsupportable burden.

Finally, we must observe that it is no coincidence that sexuality, marriage, and motherhood (the "feminine" roles) are seen by feminists as most oppressive. During the earlier phases of feminism, women sometimes appeared to be seeking male roles; later, their expressed ideal was a random interchangeability of the roles. But as it matures, feminism is moving toward what Mary Daly terms androgyny—the removal of roles, or more accurately, of sexuality itself. Arianna Stassinopoulos suggests that the reason feminists demean or ignore their reproductive systems is that they are a "horrid reminder of the fundamental differences between men and women."³⁴ But Midge Decter chooses to interpret it in reverse fashion: women acclaim sameness precisely because the realities of reproductive differences force them into direct confrontation with what she calls "the ecological chain of birthing,

growing and dying.”³⁵ The question with which she challenges feminists then, is: in their demand to be freed from the costs and pains that womanhood by its nature has always included, are they not in fact seeking a system wherein a woman might remain “as unformed, as able to act without genuine consequence, as the little girl she once was and longs to continue to be”?³⁶

IV

One major reason for feminism's increasing status in our culture is that it is identifiable as one of a growing number of contemporary ideologies which are derived from the conviction that there exist "inalienable" human rights. One reads of claims for the rights of the handicapped, the elderly, even the short, the left-handed, or the obese, almost as frequently as those of the black or the poor. The often angry demands of such groups vary from "equal" rights (presumably with the most privileged) to compensatory rights that go beyond the usual privileges in the name of retribution (against society, nature or fate). A woman's right to most aspects of social privilege is being accepted by an increasing majority of both men and women, with any interfering legislation gradually being altered. In this chapter we shall examine the question of what women truly seek, asking whether a call for equal rights, or for that matter any of the petitions of feminism, can in fact bring them what they desire.

The origin of the assumption that human equality of circumstance is a right and that it can be claimed is apparently the "self-evident" truth of the American Declaration of Independence and the French philosophies which inspired it. One would be hard pressed to find any explicit justification for demanding human rights in Scripture (although no doubt attempts have been made to render some texts as implying such justification). One would be even harder pressed to support belief in equal rights from observation of the natural world, where even survival itself is granted only sometimes to the fittest. There are probably only two situations wherein a claim for human rights might be valid: the existence of a designer/creator god (not necessarily the Christian God) who elected to include them in his plan; or, for the non-theist, the existence of a humanly established government that arbitrarily (not inevitably) grants these rights to those under its jurisdiction.

Yet observance of the attitudes of today's rights-seekers indicates that neither of these are believed to exist as the basis for their rights. Rather, both gods and governments are themselves called to accountability for their "position" on the question of rights, almost as though the proof of *their* validity rested on this issue. What this suggests, then, is an adherence to the personal criterion for truth mentioned earlier, which would say, in essence, "I have a right to rights because I feel like I do." The fact that many if not most people feel similarly gives additional weight to this conviction—but it remains nonetheless a personal, subjective belief not supported by any prior, external standard.

The obvious question which then must be answered by feminism (and other rights-seeking groups) is how exactly are they going to get their rights? Whom will they entreat to provide substance to their feelings that some things are without question rightfully theirs? Since it is rare that gods are invoked to make human situations more equitable (this, not because we wouldn't, but because we've tried with little success), then it remains the burden of governments and societies to make real the equitableness sought.

At first glance, it might seem that the wisest choice would be to regard the government as the proper provider/enforcer of "natural" human rights. Assuming a government to be that sort whose principles and powers are drawn from public consent, it should in theory at least be easy to imagine a system wherein equitable distribution of material wealth, educational and vocational opportunity, and the less tangible rights to personal protection, legal justice, and freedom of action are incorporated as a central feature. If we as a people agree that because human rights are an unquestionable priority we will support only those governmental forms which coincide with our beliefs, then there seems little reason to doubt that we could thereby receive our rights.

However, we must at the same time be willing to grant this government enormous powers over our personal lives. If our desire is equity at any cost, only the most naive would expect that cost to be small. Since unlimited freedom for all members of a society is in essence impossible (my freedom extends only to the boundaries of yours), then the government who arbitrates social freedoms must be fully able to *limit* the freedoms of any individuals it judges to be “too free”—or too wealthy, or too privileged, etc.

It would seem that history should have taught us to be wary of according such power to any government. Yet apparently feminism and its counterparts fail to see that they cannot both demand social equities and at the same time seek riddance of powerful governmental structures. It is the same story as that of societies who want food at any cost, or, as Francis Schaeffer observes of our American populace, personal peace and affluence at any cost.³⁷ Feminism joins with so many other voices in the clamor for freedom—but rather than freedom from control, what actually appears to be sought is freedom to participate in, to own, to choose from an unlimited supply of options. If the reverse were true, then feminists might have to be willing to accept financial privation, less (or no) education, and a naturally restricted range of personal activity, in exchange for a relatively weak government. There is little evidence that they, or any of us, are selecting this alternative. Rather, we are opting for what Os Guinness has called “the illusion of freedom based on apparent diversity of choice.”³⁸ It is a specific sort of freedom, characterized by the alleviation of personal hardship and the issuance of personal privilege, at the expense of authentic personal freedom.

Returning to our original question—does the demand for rights really bring a woman what she wants?—we see that the answer at least tends toward the negative. Women and men (like the children they once were) still fall for the eternal deception that happiness will come once they acquire what they don’t now have, be it material possessions, public acclaim, or unlimited freedom of action. Feminists may consider themselves able to demand (from the government, or from science, or from society at large) their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—but what they eventually will have to learn is that they cannot effectively demand from anyone that which they truly seek: happiness, self-fulfillment, and personal dignity.

Since the philosophers of the ages have debated the nature of these three (happiness, fulfillment and dignity), we cannot presume here to make any final statements. Nonetheless, we shall allow ourselves a few observations pertaining to the unlikelihood of their being produced through an application of feminist ideology. For example, happiness, it would seem, presupposes the ability to be satisfied with the present reality of one’s circumstances. We aren’t happy yet, say feminists, because our circumstances aren’t right. But not only can they not very clearly decide what might comprise “right” circumstances, they also have no guarantee (from themselves or anyone else) that they will in fact then be happy. The emotions they exercise and encourage in others are anger, unrest, rebelliousness, self-seeking and distrust. Their friendships and loyalties are based heavily on shared grievances. At what point, and for what reason, would they individually (let alone collectively) switch to peaceful, trusting attitudes? Were the last trace of patriarchy to vanish from this planet, were women given total power (in whatever form they wanted it) and total privilege—still it is doubtful that such triumph and satisfaction would contain or even permit deep and sustained happiness. No man has found power and privilege to bring authentic joy. There may seem to be a joy in the pursuit of power, joy in the conquest—but these are transitory at best. Without continued conquest such satisfactions vanish. And who could describe bondage to conquest (with its ever-present possibility of defeat) as happiness?

The incompatibility of feminism with the realization of self-fulfillment has its source in a different aspect of feminist philosophy: their refusal to accept any standard beyond themselves. Self-fulfillment comes when a woman recognizes the meaningfulness of her existence, usually corresponding with a realization of the value of her thoughts and actions. But such value must either exist as valuableness to others (including perhaps God) or else it must somehow exist as the self's value to itself. It is conceivable that I might paint a picture that so delighted me that its value could rest solely on my private enjoyment of it. However, not only could I not guarantee that I would always like the picture, but to make the extension that because I painted a valuable (to me) picture I was therefore valuable in the totality of my human potential is absurd.

The fact is that even were they to want to (and many feminists show considerable ambivalence on this matter), they cannot ignore or remove that dimension of human fulfillment that depends on deep and extended interpersonal relationships, with all the ties and vulnerabilities such relationships entail. But to acknowledge their dependence on others (even other "sisters" in the movement) would indicate that their meaningfulness was to that extent defined externally. A fully self-determined self could be complete (as least theoretically) in isolation from other selves. To admit that society (even the society of one or two carefully chosen friends) establishes and confirms the nature of my valuableness is to give myself over to the bondage of its discretion. I cannot insist that someone value me in any certain way, for if he or she complied simply because I demanded it, such value would be bereft of meaning altogether.

The question of human dignity is perhaps the least easily discussed. Dignity is something that results from an individual's realization of his or her own worth, but it also seems to require a special sort of social acknowledgement. There is great concern on the part of human rights proponents to stress the dignity of each human being, but in fact what appears to result is an obscuring of the meaning of dignity. Dignity, like fulfillment, depends on the existence of personal value—but the question remains: what sort of value exists? We are told: all people are valuable and thus have dignity simply because they're human. But why should humanness equal value, and why should this (by definition) indicate dignity? Women have rarely been deemed not human, yet even on their own admission they are deprived of dignity. Or perhaps we are told: dignity will be the lot of all humans once we are freed to make our own decisions concerning our existence. Dignity is thus a function of the value of self-determination. "She was poor, but too proud to take charity." "At least I did it my way." This is one of the more widely held understandings of dignity; yet it too presents difficulties.

The main problem is that when self-determination (personal freedom) is considered the highest value, or at least irreplaceable as the provider of human dignity, other values which might interfere with one's independence must be de-emphasized or eliminated. Yet, as mentioned before, unlimited freedom for everyone is by nature impossible, and thus some external value system *must* be called in to adjudicate relative freedoms. We might admire (and acknowledge the dignity of) a soldier who refused to follow orders to harm an enemy civilian, but we rarely are inclined to see dignity in the rapist who ignored authority to act *his* way. Dignity here is not simply the product of self-determination, but is in fact largely determined by an entirely different value system.

The truth is that dignity is almost invariably associated with personal maturity. And while maturity is to an extent subjectively defined, few people are disposed to interpret the petulant demands of a spoiled child as denoting maturity. Maturity comes when problems and undesirable circumstances are faced and dealt with realistically, when I am able gracefully to grant another person freedom at my own expense. Dignity and maturity are thus precisely the product of my own security, the certainty I have that I am

valuable in and of myself, which eliminates my need to prove to anyone (including myself) that I can force another to bend to my will.

Here then we find a fallacy of feminism that penetrates to some of its deepest assumptions. Behind their cries for freedom from oppression, what feminists actually desire most is the certain knowledge that they as women are valuable, that their position in society is one of recognized dignity, and that their lives will provide confirmation of their worth through an abiding sense of fulfillment. They rightly recognize the critical importance of men in the realization of these desires. However, in what seems to be a subconscious fear of their own responsibilities, feminists make the almost bizarre assumption that men have at their fingertips the power to grant women value, but out of blindness, whimsy, or the evilness of their hearts have chosen not to. Hence the accusation, the demands that men give women their rightful share of meaningfulness, and the manifest lack of concern for (or unwillingness to see) the realities of *male* insecurities and feelings of worthlessness.

Before considering an alternative to feminism wherein both women and men might be restored to authentic security and dignity, let us look briefly at what is produced when men themselves adopt the principles that feminism endorses. This need not be a hypothetical exercise, for indeed the male counterpart to feminism exists and thrives in our society, and has done so for years. It is ironic but immensely significant that this counterpart represents the very segment of our male population most offensive to the feminists, specifically the playboys.

William S. Banowsky has analyzed the phenomenon of playboyism in his brilliantly perceptive book, *It's a Playboy World*. He quickly discerns that the philosophy propounded by Hugh Hefner, playboyism's leading spokesman, is "an apology for aggrandizement of the self, with all of the accompanying disorders of arrogance, exaggerated self-importance, and unrealistic self-expectation."³⁹ He notes that adherents of this philosophy of "perverted individualism" frequently withdraw from society, assuming a posture of disdain or exploitation of others. Perfectly echoing feminism's denouncement of self-sacrifice as a virtue, these playboys venerate rugged individualism as the mark of authentic humanity. That feminism might give relatively less emphasis to physical pleasure than these men do in no way negates the parallel, for not only is there nothing in feminist philosophy that precludes a woman's participation in physical excesses, but in fact for the playboy pleasure itself is not the basis of his life. Rather, his goal, like that of the feminist, is the immediate gratification, upon demand, of any or all forms of personal desire.⁴⁰ But, as it happens, men and women generally seem to desire different things.

While feminists may look to androgyny, and playboys to exaggerated sexual differentiation, in fact neither has a healthy attitude toward the depths and purposes of human sexuality. If the playboy's sex life were satisfying, he would have no need to talk about it. As Banowsky notes, they give themselves away by talking too much.⁴¹ The playboy would reduce the totality of sexuality to a brief physical experience, and he does this precisely because he lacks the personal security (and sufficient maturity) to confront the responsibilities that the broader meaning of sexuality, including marriage, would force upon him. The freedom he demands, according to Banowsky, is "an immunity from all restraints, from any real hardship, from discipline and from sacrifice."⁴² It is the same freedom sought by feminists, who, in the words of Arianna Stassinopoulos, "long for a world where human relationships involve no effort, no responsibility, and where success is guaranteed in advance."⁴³

There is, however, at least one other reason besides personal immaturity that might prompt men and women to embrace the fallacies of playboyism and feminism: they know of no better alternative. False pleasure is better than none, false dignity than no dignity. These men and women demand the freedom to live by self-determined standards *not* because the self has always proved to be reliable, but because other standards have been experienced as less so. From the perspective of feminism, traditional sexual roles are an integral part of a social order they find oppressive. In their impatience to be relieved of oppression, these roles and almost all other traditional ideas of womanhood are thrown out on the unstudied assumption that they are all bad, that they all are a part of the source of oppression. But when feminists choose to see as completely false that which might actually be only a distortion of the truth, they thereby forfeit access to that truth, which, had it not been summarily rejected, may finally prove to be far better than any “new” truths feminism might hope (or indeed, be forced) to discover.

The predominant factor which governs a society's choice of social forms (including sexual forms) is the understanding that society has of what is valuable. Generally speaking, people value those things which they believe will bring them closer to the two basic human goals, happiness and significance. Happiness here includes the satisfaction of physical and emotional needs, while significance involves the spiritual nature of men and women which seeks purpose and personal dignity. One reason feminism has proven attractive to so many women is that it explicitly confronts these women's feelings of unhappiness and insignificance and promises them a real measure of relief. Further, it offers this promise in terms that are currently fashionable, such as those contained in the demand-for-rights philosophy discussed above. At the same time, feminism points an accusing finger at the numerous places where traditional forms have failed to answer, and sometimes even to acknowledge, the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of women.

The words most often used to describe feminism's values (and indeed, those of much of today's society) include such things as freedom, autonomy, independence, self-determination, etc. According to Elizabeth Janeway, what women want most is "control over their own lives and authority or influence commensurate with their abilities in the external world."⁴⁴ Because the self is believed to be most capable not only in the securing of physical and emotional satisfactions but also in determining a standard whereby self-worth can be assured, then feminists logically conclude that personal power (not over others, but over one's own circumstances) is what women most need (and what men presumably already have).

We mentioned in the previous chapter some of the problems inherent in such a demand for self-determination. For one thing, the only place where self-determination can successfully operate in the real social world is within a larger context of external control by the government or whomever. Our generation too quickly takes for granted the political peace and economic affluence purchased by our parents' blood, sweat and tears. Our values reflect an attitude that such peace and affluence are ours by right, not by gift. Criticism of our parents' values (such as nationalism and materialism) that produced our inheritance might have some justification coming from the truly virtuous, but it is doubtful that many of us represent such virtue. Our self-seeking echoes our parents'; we merely perceive personal oppression to come from a different source. But we dare not become blinded to our enormous need for a stable, wise government (at all levels); correspondingly, we must remember that autonomy or independence can never stand as our only, or even our highest, social value.

Let us look more closely, now, at why exactly self-determination holds such appeal to feminists. To begin, they interpret the frustrations of the homemaker to be almost entirely the product of the involuntary confinements of her daily regimen; if she could, she would live differently. She would become educated, she would make money, she would enter the "real world" and use her talents to help solve its problems. Her expressed motives might include her need for a sense of accomplishment, financial freedom (or contribution to the family), and the satisfactions of service. All of which may be seen as worthy motivations. However, we need to realize that education, careers, service, etc. are not directly the product of self-determination. Women could as easily be *required* to learn, to earn money, or to serve as they are to do household tasks. Feminism's goal is not education or careers, any more than the suffragettes wanted simply the right to vote. What both groups seek (sought) is status, dignity, and the power they believe necessary to retain these.

Again, all this speaks overwhelmingly of women's basic insecurity and their felt lack of self-worth. Since college degrees and careers are so closely associated with men's status achievement, women are frequently enticed into viewing these as solutions for them. But were men to move their "status arena" to sports or military competence, for example, chances are a woman's "self-determination" would direct her to follow. In other words, she would not really be freed by equal rights legislation or anything else; she is simply asking to be caught up into a larger and larger sphere wherein she not only may, but eventually must, prove her competence. And, as we noted earlier, the current trend seems to be moving her into areas where she is less and less likely to succeed.

To consider autonomy or self-determination as a primary value, for either men or women, implies directly that the holder of such a value is driven by strong feelings of oppression. When the early American patriots named independence as their goal, it was in the context of clear oppression by the British government. In similar fashion, feminists view their demands for self-determination as justified by their perceived oppression by men. However, as we've considered earlier, these perceptions may be faulty. Not that many men haven't treated women unjustly; that has never been questioned. But what is very possibly happening is actually a *mutual* oppression between men and women, where the sexes respond to each other in an ever-growing cycle of hurt. And if this is so, then it is a different sort of oppression than that felt by the patriots. Their problem was clearly external, whereas if we ourselves are both oppressors and oppressed, we should have unique leverage to correct the situation in a much less militant fashion, requiring less aggressive values.

Since the idea of mutual oppression by the sexes is being offered as a hypothesis, we need to evaluate its merit on the terms usually applied to hypotheses: i.e., its compatibility with perceived data, and its effectiveness in producing desired results. We have mentioned that feminism's hypothesis of one-way oppression (i.e. of women by men) fails to account adequately for the frustrations of men, who often are driven to sexual excesses or dehumanizing treatment of women precisely because they too are insecure in their human, and male, identities. In contrast, our understanding that male and female reactions to each other may be reciprocally produced seems far more sufficiently to explain not only today's sexual paranoias and perversities, but also the inability of both men and women to find a context wherein they can function as sexually secure adults. To give an example, the home and family situation may well have become depreciated as a locus of valuable activity for women exactly because women, as wives and mothers, have taken from their husbands the family leadership position that was more properly the man's. These husbands respond with gradual disinterest in, and devaluation of, family concerns, and their collective attitude in turn influences strongly "society's" estimation of the status of home-oriented activities.

The real power, however, of the hypothesis of mutual oppression lies in its suggestion that we quit blaming each other and instead work together to relieve the situation. To a degree, of course, feminism has already recognized this potential. Tradition, they point out, has refused to let men be weak just as it has refused to let women be strong. If together we oust traditional stereotypes, we'll both be freer. But not only is this but a small fragment of a much more complex problem, it also is a misreading of what tradition actually intends. The "macho," never-be-weak hypermasculinity that is considered the stereotype is actually a distortion, produced directly by the real sense of weakness men so often feel. In strictly logical terms, the problem of non-strength can be solved in two ways: by denying the need for strength, or by becoming strong. The third way, pretending to be strong, has never been and will never be a satisfying solution. If in fact men do need to be strong (and there are many indications that this is more than just an arbitrary, socially-conditioned need), then the truer solution is simply to allow them to

become strong. They aren't actually required by tradition to be totally strong, but merely stronger than women in certain specific areas (e.g., as leaders or providers). If we as women would agree that such territory is theirs in which to become as strong as possible, then to also be occasionally weak would be a permissible, and grantedly freeing, option for men.

Thus we come to see that a total rejection of tradition may not necessarily be the key to mutual restoration between the sexes. Rather, we suggest, what might be more profitable is a reassessment of our choice of social values. When feminism selects self-determination as the critical power that women must have to become happy and fulfilled, they are assuming by implication that a woman's environment will normally be hostile to that fulfillment. From this perspective, self-determination, freedom and autonomy may be termed "defensive" values. We must control our own choices because no one else can be trusted to choose that which is favorable to us. But since our real goal is a happy and fulfilled society, then, as a value, freedom's role should proportionately diminish as we near our goal. Independence is most valuable to us in the context of oppression; when oppression is eliminated, such defensive values become extraneous.

If in fact our mutual desire as men and women is to insure maximum personal happiness and fulfillment for each of us, then our more useful values, in this context especially, would not be defensive, but rather constructive and integrative, particularly with regard to interpersonal and inter-group relationships. Instead of emphasizing self-determination, which at best isolates and more often alienates, we should seek to find alternative, creatively constructive values which would work to enhance mutual trust and supportiveness. These values would not presuppose a hostile environment to be meaningful, but would first work to alter the environment itself, and would then remain functional (i.e. valuable) even when the environment is finally healed.

To identify our ultimate goals as happiness and significance does not mean that there cannot also be more specific descriptions of what we seek. Two such specific goals, often mentioned in feminist literature, are community and the opportunity for creative self-expression. We would agree that when humans are truly fulfilled and happy both of these are usually present, and we would further point out that neither goal is precluded when the traditional male/female roles are properly enacted. However what is largely lacking in our society is an emphasis on the positive, constructive values that are necessary to develop both close, communal relationships and also the uncompetitive, creative expressions of our personalities and talents that provide us with a secure sense of our own importance and individuality.

The first constructive value we might offer for consideration, therefore, is sensitivity to others. Much of our oppressive behavior results from our total absorption with our own needs and problems, which causes us to perceive others as objects who function merely to aid or hinder our private purposes. We can best discover our own human identity and dignity by acknowledging these in others, and this in turn is directly facilitated by our concerned sensitivity to who they are and what they need. Of course, such sensitivity must be combined with a truly benevolent spirit, for one can also become sensitively cruel (as every spouse knows), playing against the other's special vulnerabilities.

A more unconditionally positive and perhaps an even more critically needed value that we as a society have neglected is gratitude. Whenever we assume that something is ours by right, we eliminate the option of receiving it as a gift and thus remove the opportunity for gratitude. Much of this is due to a distorted idea we have of giving, where we assume that all "gifts" must be either merited or repaid; thus

we view givers as holding power over us whereby they can demand in return a certain performance or remuneration. Much of our elevation of the virtue of self-reliance may stem from this underlying fear that any acceptance of another's good-will or gifts engenders an indebtedness that is ultimately oppressive or dehumanizing. Yet in our eagerness to deprive potential givers of this assumed power, we have opted for the position that practically nothing of value can be given, but is somehow due us by virtue of our "natural" human right to it.

And the results of this perspective may prove in the long run to be even more oppressive. To the extent, for example, that a husband expects his wife to cook his meals, he thereby deprives her of the opportunity to see her service as a gift expressing her love, or even as meaningful at all. Similarly, when a wife takes for granted her husband's earnings, or children their parents' provisions, what is produced is not confidence in the loving commitment of the family, but more often greed and jealousy and family rivalries. To be sure, gifts and gratitude have often been abused; however, rightly understood, gratitude as a value has few equals in its ability to foster community and to permit individuals to realize the meaningfulness of their personal contribution to those who are most important to them.

What may finally be our greatest necessity, however, is the development of values which are based on self-discipline and a personal sense of responsibility. Modern Americans tend to see their happiness and fulfillment as something to be *wrested* from the environment or the powers that be; at the same time, they have largely ignored the more difficult truth that much of what is needed is not external change, but rather a change *wrought* in their own personalities. The above values of sensitivity and gratitude represent such "wrought" changes, as do other constructive values, including honesty, patience, respect, willingness to share, forgiveness, etc. The key to all of these lies in our learning to seek, individually and corporately, the qualities of mature, dependable behavior, whereby the impulses of childish self-seeking are replaced by self-discipline and a true awareness of and respect for the needs and natures of those around us. Our physical, moral, mental and spiritual "flabbiness" as a nation is vastly apparent to outside observers, yet our undisciplined irresponsibility stands only to be heightened by our petitions for self-determination which show little desire for either external or personal control.

How has it happened that we should find ourselves undisciplined? One major answer is that we as a society have applied our chosen priorities of self-determination and self-expression to our philosophies of child-rearing. The modern American child is encouraged at an early age to understand his rights, to make his own choices, to be "independent." A child's assertive self-expression is often interpreted by his parents as a sign of strength and "spirit," and in our age of accelerated learning and the radically premature sophistication engendered by television, many children demonstrate a sort of precocious wisdom that alternately makes proud and threatens their parents. In addition, the increasing publicity, if not frequency, of child abuse offenses has produced a national sensitivity to overly dominating adults, and we respond with educational and social policies which again work to defend the freedoms of the child.

Nonetheless, all of this represents a huge misunderstanding of the meaning of personal freedom. A child begins life as the center of his world, and has no desire to forego the powers and privileges he perceives to be his. Yet if left essentially uncontrolled, a child's freedom (or later, the childish adult's freedom) will be characterized by deep bondage to emotional passions, selfishness, an inability to share or to compromise, and often inescapable addictions to eating, spending money, drugs, etc. As William Banowsky observes, "We take an important step forward when we realize that, like it or not, we are going to be governed by something."⁴⁵

The best alternative to this sort of bondage to self is simply self-control. The disciplined person will not react violently when a situation requires that he yield to another's wishes, or that he wait until it is his turn to act. He thus demonstrates far greater dignity when confronted with frustrations than one who is used to the "freedom" of getting his own way. Furthermore, this discipline needs to be developed at all levels of personal volition, including physical desires, emotional responses, and mental activities. The feminist who venerates the "free" creative expressions of an artist often ignores the immense self-discipline and attention to standards that authentic creativity generally requires.

How might we acquire such mastery over our powerful natural impulses? There are two basic places where self-control can be learned: either we learn it as children, or else we fight our way through our adult world until (perhaps) our circumstances force us to yield to them. The former option is obviously less painful to us and less destructive to others—yet increasingly fewer parents believe that it is their task to teach their children self-control. Or else, while believing that it *is* good for a child to be self-controlled, they fail to understand what they as parents must do.

Although we are unable here to offer an extensive discussion of child-raising procedures, it is our contention that parental discipline based on and governed by love is an indispensable element in the rearing of an emotionally healthy child. If we as a society choose to reestablish the priority of constructive "wrought" values such as patience, respect and honesty, then the ideal way for these to be learned is through a combination of example and training by parents. Most important, though, is the process whereby children are taught self-control, which frees them from bondage to their passions into the far greater liberty found in the strength to realistically accept and react to the world through wise and deliberate choices. Yet the only way a child gains true mastery over his own will, so that his choices can reflect the un-natural, wrought values that will actually bring him happiness and fulfillment, is by first learning to submit voluntarily to his parents' will.

Which implies, of course, that the parents must teach him this submission, since no child yields his self-will of his own accord. The process is technically simple. The parents establish certain rules: for example, that the child must be honest, respectful and obedient. When the child fails to comply, especially with deliberate defiance, then the parent must immediately and without compromise set his or her will against the child's until the child completely relents. Yet certain precautions need to be observed. The discipline must never involve the parent's anger, nor should there at any time be any suggestion of withdrawal of the parent's love. Furthermore, the obedience required by the parent of the child should never be in selfish service to the parent's needs, but rather obviously in the best interest of the child. Most child abuse cases involve one or more of these three errors: the child is beaten out of anger, without love, and frequently because he (the child) has failed to meet an emotional or physical need of the immature parent, who himself has no self-control or self-esteem.

Proper discipline, and an even greater measure of supportive love, will give a child invaluable security in his own worth and capabilities. Freed from the need to always have his own way, knowing that even in the face of his naughtiness his parents love him and care enough about him not to let him continue in it, the child is able to discover and express the positive aspects of his personality and creativity, and to become a part of a community where he doesn't require the constant attention of others to know that he is important. Submission to his parents' will, as a child, does not prevent him from becoming gradually more self-reliant as he matures, nor does it mean that he will develop a dependency on his parents that will have to be transferred elsewhere (e.g. to a spouse or political leader) when the parents are no longer

around. *That* sort of dependency is the product of low self-esteem, an inability to make decisions (or to bear responsibility for decisions made), or a fear of rejection. The parent who disciplines a child properly will find that he or she needs to overpower the child's will relatively few times before the child himself becomes able to control that "will" (i.e. his childish self-centeredness), eventually learning to make mature choices without assistance.⁴⁶

Questions of child rearing may appear tangential to the concerns of feminism, but for a number of vital reasons they cannot be considered so. Women who espouse feminism normally accept children as something they have the right, but not the obligation, to bring into the world; thereafter, issues involving children usually center on such matters as professional child care or sex role stereotyping. To be sure, individual feminists may be very conscientious mothers, but the corporate voice of feminism rarely speaks of anything more specific than a general intent to "build a better world for our daughters."

Nonetheless, implicit in feminism are certain features that directly concern children, with which feminists must sooner or later come to some sort of terms. For example, the demand for the extension of "human" rights to all humans raises the question of whether children have the same degree of humanness and correspondingly the same rights as adults. If feminists decide that children are different and cannot enjoy the same rights as adults, there remain the questions of why they are different and at what point they pass from childhood to adulthood. Competence to make choices or other such tests of maturity cannot be the determining factor, for not only are these quite subjectively defined, some fourteen-year-olds may easily be wiser or more capable than some thirty-year-olds. The normal distinctions, deriving from religious or governmental rulings, which allow children fewer personal rights while they are in the home of or under the authority of their parents, are not intrinsically compatible with the basic tenants of feminism and would have to be appended as almost contradictory exceptions to what most of feminism holds true.

Yet the alternative, to grant the same rights to children as feminism would give adults, carries with it nearly limitless consequences. Most basically, it would remove from parents any authority to train or instruct their children in a fashion with which the child disagrees. Not only does this deprive the child of the context to learn self-control as discussed above, it would also foster immense insecurities in that he would be forced to construct out of little more than his inner impulses the boundaries of his social and ethical world. And as the child's environment becomes increasingly comprised of professional training situations (interspersed with the powerful training of television), the parent stands to lose touch with the greatest portion of his or her child's development, something about which even feminists may have second thoughts.

The main consequence, however, of feminism's general disregard for child rearing is that they are ignoring the crucial importance of these questions to the shaping of any society's future. Feminists have realized that "mythic" sex roles are taught at an early age and thus are diligently rewriting fairy tales and textbooks to exorcise any sexist influences these may contain. Beyond this, little feminist energy seems to be expended on understanding the full nature and consequences of their children's intellectual, social and moral training so often entrusted to "professionals." Feminists all too rarely concern themselves with such problems as illiterate high school graduates, teenage divorces, or pervasive moral degeneracy. Absorbed by their own unhappiness, they have little time to examine any problems faced by their daughters or their sons that differ from their own. But these are problems that are already beginning to overshadow the problems of sexual oppression. The daughter who is "freely" entering her second marriage at the age of nineteen, or who wrestles with the emotional strains of an abortion at fifteen, or

who is “on her own” in some counterculture or cultic world, has far graver needs than the bored and restless housewife who raised her. Nor is there much ground for optimism concerning the society of the children the daughter may someday raise.

The question of social values, in all its breadth, is one that neither feminists nor any of us can afford to evade. If we choose to allow our children to grow up without learning self-control and without the social and moral boundaries formed by even our own experience, let alone the wisdom of the ages, we are choosing for them as well the almost inevitable consequences of cultural chaos and personal despair. Increased emphasis on self-determination may be a needed corrective in certain contexts of today’s world, but it must never be allowed to override the much more crucial values of self-discipline and personal integrity, and the security of a social order that encourages awareness of both the needs and responsibilities of each member of that society.

VI

We are now ready to contrast in more detail traditional sexual forms with those advocated by feminism. The place where the question of sexual roles most naturally focuses is in the institution of marriage. Here man meets woman at the greatest depth and with the largest number of consequences. Our culture's uneasiness (if not disillusionment) with the results of marriage has suggested to some that marriage may yet prove to be a passing form. Responding to the confusion of values, the elusiveness of personal fulfillment, and the sensed loss of identity and dignity that torments the present generation, we are shaking every pillar that supports the social edifice, hoping to find one whose poor construction might explain our problems. Yet were every pillar removed, and were we to find ourselves cast onto the bedrock of our own natures, there is little doubt that most of the problems would yet remain, and also that any scaffolding hastily erected against the chaos would prove even less reliable than the pillars we destroyed.

That marriages are "going bad" with accelerating frequency cannot be denied. Still, although all possible alternatives are certain to be tested, there are few indications that marriage as a norm for male/female relationship will be replaced any time soon. Apart from a few extremists, most feminists include marriage as a necessary element of their ideal society, albeit with careful attention to the meanings and limitations such marriages should hold.

The predominant theme in feminism's vision for marriage renewal is that of "mutuality" or "reciprocity."⁴⁷ Early feminism tentatively forwarded a picture of equality, wherein all aspects of married responsibility would be evenly shared with assiduously governed divisions. But this was soon recognized to be more oppressive than helpful, insofar as it ignored personal differences of aptitude and interest. With new wisdom, feminism now speaks of a mutuality that accepts the flexibilities and idiosyncrasies of individual couples, who, in their love for each other and their openness to the demands of marriage, would work out a suitable partnership arrangement in which the various tasks and privileges are allocated in a fashion agreeable to both.

Two features of the "mutuality" marriage plan are important. First, there is great concern (consistent with the major premises of feminism) that husbands and wives be freed from traditional masculine and feminine occupations. Men are encouraged to care for the children or do household tasks, women to participate in the financial support of the family. Often a system is devised whereby these responsibilities are shared, along with opportunities for education, social involvements, or creative hobbies. Sometimes the husband's needs or desires are given priority; sometimes, the wife's.

The second characteristic, which is more significant in that it reaches to a deeper level of the relationship, is the requirement that decision-making also be mutually shared. Feminist deploring of patriarchal (and usually all hierarchical) modes stems directly from their understanding that the ground of all oppression lies in one person's authority to make decisions concerning another's life. Under the plan of reciprocal leadership, both marriage partners are at liberty to protect their own interests, each one yielding at times, but both knowing that "his turn will come around in other circumstances and give him another chance to see his wishes fulfilled."⁴⁸

Three basic arguments are used to justify the advisability of this plan. First, it appears to more fully insure the provision of the wife's needs, the inclusion of her tastes and interests in the family's choice of activities, and a defense against unreasonable selfishness on the part of the husband. Secondly, it enables

the whole family to benefit directly from the wife's leadership competence in such areas as financial planning and time management. Finally, it offers to the wife the psychic satisfactions of "full" status, greater independence, and recognized power in most if not all aspects of the marriage relationship.

At first glance such a marriage of mutuality seems not only highly workable, but also maximally able to avoid the problems of oppression that so often have accompanied the traditional marriage pattern. However, this plan contains within it one key flaw, understandably overlooked by feminists, but portending from the outset its ultimate ineffectuality. That flaw is simply that it almost totally ignores the nature of men.

Earlier in this paper we discussed feminism's persuasion that differences between the sexes are by and large culturally derived. The hope of androgyny is that each human being will learn to partake of the strengths of both masculinity and femininity without regard to his or her genetically defined sex. Feminists are encouraged in this vision by their observation that in fact some women make good leaders, some men good nurturers, etc. From their perspective, most women are fully capable of taking on "male" roles, and men (they assume) could as easily (or if not as easily, eventually) participate in all but the biologically impossible elements of "female" roles. Thus they find no difficulty in seeing the ideal marriage as a flexible, reciprocal partnership of equally capable adults, whose needs are essentially the same and whose enlightened sense of fairness could lift them above the imbalances of traditional marriage rules and roles.

Nonetheless, their vision is a blind one. Apart from the fact that the angry, self-seeking attitudes of feminists are not likely to generate trusting, mutually giving ties with anyone, even as a separate ideal this marriage based on mutuality has little ground in human sexual realities, particularly those of males. We need now to explore some of these realities, not supposing that they can be completely or flawlessly described, but seeking nevertheless to demonstrate to feminists that marriage is and has to be more than, and different than, a partnership of two fundamentally alike individuals.

Probably the most basic reality that needs to be accepted is simply that men and women *are* different. Biologically, they're different. Hormonally, they're different. Goldberg's research into the aggressive capacities of males cannot be ignored. Before we examine some ramifications of these obvious differences (and there may well be other, less tangible, differences that are also not reducible to conditioned responses) we should note in passing the telling fact that few if any men have ever suggested *they* believe men and women to be essentially the same, or that they would consider androgyny to be a higher stage of human development. To be sure, a number of men find a marriage of mutuality attractive—but, as we shall see, their motivation may well be significantly different from a woman's.

One observation (usually expressed by men) concerning the effects of biological sexual differences is that nature provides a woman with a far more conclusive sense of her own sexual identity than it does a man.⁴⁹ Feminists often bemoan the inability of women to escape their pervasive "femaleness," but they fail to appreciate that theirs is security for which men are constantly driven to seek. The casual suggestions by feminism that the solution to both "problems" is de-emphasis on the importance of sexual identity itself belies all evidences of human psychology and sociology. As mentioned earlier, both feminism's belittling of sexuality and playboyism's exaggerations speak not of health but of maladjustment and instability.

Another ramification of biological sexuality is that it is highly unlikely that men could find equal fulfillment in the tasks of child nurturing. This is not to say that fatherhood (in its essentially male aspects) should not be of major importance to men—but rather that women have one and often two distinct advantages over men in the area of “feminine” nurturing capacities: they alone can bear and nurse children. While it is theoretically possible that women could invade nearly all corners of male territory (except biological fathering), men are in turn restricted from a portion of the female experience that (despite feminist efforts) will always continue to bring women a strong sense of their own importance. Because women can so easily succeed in nurturing tasks, and men so easily fail, feminists face a major challenge in convincing men that they should “share alike” in such occupations.

Possibly as a compensatory effort, possibly as a chance whim of nature, or possibly as an intentional plan of God, men have within them the impulses (and hormones) which in fact direct them into an aggressive search for those activities in which they will not only succeed, but which will also assure them of acknowledged status in society. In most cultures, according to Goldberg, sharp distinctions are maintained between those areas in which men and women are granted status (albeit what one culture considers male province another may see as female).⁵⁰ Our society’s efforts to transcend such distinctions may seem effective for a while, as “enlightened” men permit women to share in their work and their successes. There are, however, at least a couple of critical factors to watch for which might deflate feminism’s optimism that such radical social renovation is actually what they interpret it to be.

The first clue that in fact something other than feminism’s desired processes is taking place lies in the realization that men are indeed *permitting* women to enter their world. Women petition them on many levels, from angry “rights”-justified demands to an appeal that women seek work for their (the woman’s) financial security or emotional fulfillment. In the first instance, men are called upon to be fair (dare we say noble?); in the second, their response may well be that of protector or provider (“the women really need to work”). There is no evidence that women have in general overpowered men, *nor* is there conclusive evidence that men view themselves as having relinquished their power to women, or (as feminism hopes) given up their need for power altogether.

A second clue, and another “reality” that feminism seems deliberately to overlook in its visions of sameness, is that men rarely if ever persist in competing with women on any serious level. Feminists’ denunciation of competition no doubt lauds this phenomenon as progress; however, they again ignore that aspect of male nature which depends on a measure of competitive success for its assurance of self-worth. As long as the majority of people in any given arena of activity are male, men can admit female associates to enter without major disruption of the often tacit competitions which are present therein. However, place a man in a context where the majority of participants *on his level* are female, and the odds are extremely high (if not inevitable) that he will either leave, or else he will find an additional compensatory arena that does permit male competition.

These two symptoms of innate male aggressiveness—the fact that women must petition men to share their world, and the persistent refusal of men to admit women into that one special fraternity of competition (wherein a large portion of male status is ultimately defined)—reflect heavily on the potential success of the “marriage of mutuality.” Basically, reciprocity in the sense intended by feminists has very little to offer a man. An appeal to his sense of fairness (or the accusation that he is otherwise acting oppressively) may carry weight initially, but in the long run even the most loving of couples will discover that questions arise where there is no clear indication of who should decide who should decide.

At that point the husband will return to his position of assumed authority that he in fact only set aside to please his wife. One of two things follow: either she will assent to his authority, or else she will rise up in competition against him, which sooner or later will force him not only to give in to her wishes, but in fact to leave the arena altogether. She will then be family leader, and any surviving sense of mutuality will be at best only a facade.

“But,” protests feminism, “isn’t that still better than the traditional form where a wife has no authority whatsoever?” History marks a grim trail of mistreated and suppressed wives, who are denied personal comforts, use of their minds and talents, and access to most of those ego-elevating dimensions of life in which men so gluttonously participate. Will not men keep their wives as passive, dependent, even infantile servants, functioning as mothers and mistresses, without hope of attaining human dignity and fulfillment?

To answer these challenges, we need now to more closely examine the traditional marriage plan, which, as we suggested earlier, may still hold the true solution to the problem of oppressed women, once the distortions are removed. To simplify our efforts, we are going to consider primarily the one central element to which feminism most objects, yet which in fact (we believe) holds the key to the restoration of marriages. That element is found in the pattern of marital relationship wherein the husband holds final authority in decision making, and the wife complies with his decisions. Two qualifications are imperative, however, for to the degree they are ignored, the horrors of insecurity and destructive responses will be reaped.

We shall look first at that qualifier which applies to the wife’s role in the marriage. Simply put, her compliance with her husband’s decisions must be willfully and supportively given. We are not referring here to the cringing obedience or the passive indifference that comprise many people’s idea of submission. Nor are we speaking of submissive tactics which employ “feminine wiles” to gain their own desired end. The submission of his wife holds great power over a man, and few women fail to exercise that power in one form or another. But for healing to occur, the wife must purpose in her heart to trust her husband, and to actively demonstrate that trust in honest acceptance of his freely made decisions concerning family matters. If he chooses to delegate certain areas of authority to her, her authority still is founded upon his.

Before confronting the deluge of objections that would be feminism’s predictable response, let us define briefly that qualification which applies to the husband’s role as decision maker. It, too, is simple: his decisions should without exception reflect choices that are in the best interest of his wife. Her “best interest” of course may at times not coincide with her desires (demands). Still, it is a husband’s primary responsibility in the marriage to insure to the best of his ability that his wife’s authentic needs, as a woman and as an individual, are met.

“But,” they say, “how absurdly unrealistic! What wife agrees cheerfully with all her husband does? What husband puts his wife’s needs before his own even occasionally, let alone always?” True—these are ideals, and admittedly rare. But we should be reminded that deeply successful marriages are also rare. Is it better to throw out all ideals because they appear unattainable, or to consider that despite their difficulty, there may in fact exist truths that can provide us with a guiding point toward which we might gradually move with ever better results? To be sure, there remains the further question of *which* ideals would most successfully guide us. But to completely reject the concept of ideals (or at least the

possibility of ever knowing them) forces one not only into the despair of random and impermanent values, but to the threshold of meaninglessness itself.

Returning to one of our earlier discussions, we presented the thesis that in actuality what is most desired by all women (including feminists) is the certain knowledge that they as women are valuable, that their position in society is one of recognized dignity, and that their lives will provide confirmation of their worth through an abiding sense of fulfillment.⁵¹ It would seem appropriate, therefore, to evaluate our ideal marriage, with the deliberate inclusion of authoritative/submissive roles, in light of these specific needs. By now it should be obvious to the reader that the most fundamental needs of women are identical with those of men. There is a place of similarity between the sexes, just as there are areas of difference. All humans seek assurance of value, dignity, and fulfillment, and to the extent these are missing, an individual will display symptoms of insecurity and frustration. Yet to assume (as does feminism) that the same needs can be met in the same way for both men and women ignores both the vital differences of sexuality and also the deepest meanings of fulfillment and dignity.

As Christians, we realize that full personal restoration can never exist apart from the value and completion we experience in our relatedness to Christ. However, within the framework of human relationships alone a significant measure of fulfillment and security is possible, once the realities of human needs, especially sexually conditioned needs, are recognized and met. If dominance (not domination) is an inborn need of men, why should marriage not permit him the security of knowing his decisions are important and heeded? If freedom for creative expression is an authentic need of a woman, what better context could she find than in the household of a man whose first concern is to see that her freedom is protected and her creativity released? People are often driven to seek public recognition of their power or talents—yet most of them eventually discover the inherent impersonality of public acclaim, whose tastes are inconstant and whose demands are frequently patterned by unrealistic idolizations. How much better that personal fulfillment be found within marriage and family relationships, where mature love can accept our limitations and yet deeply appreciate the individual strengths and gifts that are truly ours to give.

“But it never happens that way,” feminists respond. “Wives are ‘freed’ only to serve their husbands’ needs, not to express their own inner creativity.” This brings us to a critical distortion that often exists in the traditional marriage concept, but which nonetheless can be corrected. The error lies in the assumption that submission necessarily entails servitude. As we have described the ideal marriage, it is not the wife who serves, but in fact the husband. The wife’s yielding enables the husband to lead, but his leadership is fully in service to her. Nowhere is he given the right to “decide” (i.e. demand) that she serve him. Granted, a secure and fulfilled woman normally desires to meet the needs of the family she loves, but this is not part of her submission.

The key, however, to the whole system lies in our indispensable awareness that the husband *cannot* demand that his wife submit to him, nor can she demand that his decisions be in her best interest. The rights-demanding mentality of this generation works in direct opposition to the fundamental vitalization of such a marriage. Our greatest strength lies not in forcing our spouse to change (with its inevitably alienating result), but rather in our honest confrontation with our personal responsibility within the marriage. This is not a matter of accepting blame, but in fact the recognition of authentic power. For the truth is that nothing encourages a wife to submit so much as the husband’s demonstration of wise and selfless leadership; conversely, nothing fosters maturity in a husband like the trusting, yielding support of his wife.

Another crucial factor which affects the success of a marriage is the insurance that the husband's and the wife's sexual identities be secure, and further that their identities as man or woman carry with them the dignity that these properly afford. Feminism's tactic of belittling manhood (by claiming that women can and should do essentially anything men can do) forces men into the counter-tactic of treating all those things that women only do with ridicule or disdain. If on the contrary we as women chose to build men up in the uniqueness and value of their masculinity, we would find that (eventually) their response would be one of authentic and properly understood esteem of the worth of femininity. Furthermore, men will treat us as intelligent and dignified individuals, rather than as simpletons or sex objects, when we demonstrate to them that we are intelligent, mature, and deserving of their respect. And among other things men will judge our maturity by our intelligent and composed acceptance of the realities not only of our own sexual natures, but also of theirs.

To be sure, this picture of marriage does incorporate real limitations for women. Feminism's utopian freedom-to-do-anything has no place here—but neither has it a place in any authentic relationship. Further, because that sort of freedom is sought not for its own sake, but for its presumed ability to effect happiness, then we should realize that once happiness and fulfillment are found elsewhere, such freedom becomes superfluous. In a similar (though probably less obvious) way, a wife's voluntary abdication of her right to make final decisions even concerning her own welfare does not necessarily become oppressive, *if* she has yielded that authority to one who is exceedingly concerned that she not be oppressed.

“Still,” argues feminism, “what if the husband is not a good leader? What if he has no insight into his wife's and family's needs? What if he's lazy or a spendthrift or a tightwad—or worse?” Granted, these are important questions. A survey of today's American men would probably reveal that an embarrassingly large percentage of them have little desire to take on the responsibilities of proper family leadership. Raised by strong mothers, then “mothered” by strong wives, men easily relax into immature behavior, especially in the home situation. These husbands' irresponsible actions are usually combined with an inability to be sensitive to the needs of others, and most wives find it much easier to make family decisions themselves. For their personal well-being, and for the good of the children, wives assume the burden of financial budgeting, training of the children, social obligations, and anything else they perceive their husbands to be unable (or unwilling) to accept.

But is that what women really want? Or is not perhaps a great measure of the unfreedom wives feel directly the result of their carrying both their own burdens and those that should properly be their husbands'? When a woman agrees to marry a man, it is rarely because she wants to be a mother to an adult child. She more often marries him because she believes he will be a mature companion for her, able to give his strength in support of their family, and also in one or more ways a credit to her publicly. Perhaps many of today's wives, knowing the weakness of their own fathers, enter marriage with fewer expectations than these. But deep in their hearts they would probably admit that despite realities they would prefer their husbands to be stronger men. And even when, in acknowledgment of his incapability, the wife herself takes the leadership position, she very often continues to express her wishes for her husband to be strong by subtle (or not so subtle) naggings and disparagements.

On the other hand, our ideal marriage, by *defining* the husband as leader, eliminates the question of competence. Common sense might tell us that he or she who best leads, should lead—but the real life result of this logic is overburdened wives and childish husbands. Leadership in the family is *not* so

important to a husband that he will fight his wife for it, particularly in a society that has no special regard for the husband/father role. Rather, he has every inclination, out of the laziness inherent in him, to let her carry any burdens she is willing to take on. And frequently neither of them realizes how oppressive this arrangement can be for a wife. Because she accepts responsibility for solving most family problems, including her own, her husband has little motivation to become aware of her inner personal needs, and all too often seriously damages her emotionally through his unwitting insensitivities. Whereas in the ideal marriage, which identifies the meeting of his wife's needs as his highest priority, a husband is charged to carefully seek out the deep hurts and fears and longings that every woman carries inside her, and further to minister to those needs with patient uncritical love until the wife is freed to express her positive, creative qualities in the security of her husband's acceptance.

One additional feature of this ideal for marriage needs to be mentioned. When the husband accepts the leadership position, what he is actually doing is assuming responsibility for all decisions made. He is not expected to be all-wise, nor is he asked to make all decisions totally on his own. Sometimes he may ask his wife to make decisions in certain areas of family matters, although even here responsibility for the consequences is his, not hers. More often, what a wise husband will do is seek his wife's counsel on any question into which she may have insight that surpasses his own—which in fact will frequently be the case, as she generally spends more time with the children, etc. When unthreatened by her demands that he do things her way (which amounts to her seeking leadership, or at least not trusting his), then the husband will be free to draw fully from the wisdom of his wife, not in a manner that denies her abilities in order to bolster his own ego, but with profound and often public appreciation of her valuableness to him.

VII

The reader may have noticed that the major emphasis of this paper has been philosophical and psychological rather than explicitly theological. To converse theologically with feminism is difficult, mainly because in its basic ideology it only occasionally, or at least tangentially, concerns itself with theological (i.e. God-related) questions. Nonetheless, as we have considered, much of feminism involves directly the spiritual nature of men and women. The need for assurance of one's significance is singularly human, and either this significance is sought in relation to a deity, or else a sort of deification of such things as society, history or even the self must be substituted as the determining standard for meaningfulness. Moreover, feminists are acutely aware that theological beliefs have historically had an immense influence on a culture's understanding of sexual norms, and thus they are constrained to propose alternative rationales (such as Elizabeth Janeway's theory of social myth) in order to counteract the religious view that sexual roles are built into the very nature of things by God himself.

In this final chapter we are going to offer some reflections on the theological possibilities contained in our "ideal" rendition of traditional sexual roles. These reflections are tentative and designed to be more suggestive than conclusive; nevertheless, we believe that they may hold a measure of persuasive power, especially for the Christian reader who is seeking to understand the meaning and potential of his manhood or her womanhood.

To begin, it can be argued that the Biblical conceptions of freedom align themselves much more readily with the idea of personal freedom from the bondage of selfish, uncontrolled impulses than they do with feminism's picture of freedom from external authorities. The children of Israel may have been liberated by God from the tyranny of Egypt, yet God's primary objective was not political independence but rather the establishment of a covenant bond whereby the people would submit voluntarily and trustingly to his authority. This interpretation is supported by God's frequent endorsement of the Israelites' own oppression of other nations, and by his eventual decision to allow them to again go into captivity when they proved unwilling to maintain the relationship he desired.

More significantly, though, is Jesus' attitude toward freedom. Deliberately refusing to be identified with the anti-Roman Zealots, he spoke instead of an inner restoration that involved both the healing of interpersonal relationships and a renewed trust in the sufficiency of the Father. While he showed no sign of encouraging rebellion against basic patriarchal forms, he manifested without contradiction a radical willingness to acknowledge the full human dignity and significance of the women with whom he associated. There is little question that his message of freedom counters the self-seeking, autonomy-loving philosophies of today. Specifically, he taught self-denial and service to others, and demonstrated an obedience to his Father that at times was in direct opposition to his human desires.

Because of such fundamental differences, feminism's conversations with Christianity are for the most part marked not by attempted camaraderie, but by vehement challenge. If Jesus taught love and kindness toward all humans, then why has the church allowed women to be so openly degraded and oppressed? If patriarchy was indeed part of God's eternal plan, why has it historically wrought so much damage in marriages and other male/female relationships? Much of our response, of course, has been presented above, where we tried to show that it was through various distortions of the ideal authority/submission pattern that problems have arisen. Ideally, authority is not a merited position of power but in fact an assigned role of service. Similarly, submission speaks not of inferiority, but of a responsible decision to entrust one's well being to another who is stronger, which frees the one under authority to realize the

creative and self-giving expressions of his or her personality without the concern to defend his or her freedom that dominates the life of the “autonomous” individual.

But still the deeper question remains: why, if God set things up, did he do it this way? Why could not men and women have been designed more similarly, so that neither needed to be excluded from the “world” and activities of the other? Our answer to this involves a proposed interpretive scheme on the order of Janeway’s hypothesis of social myth, but which much more directly incorporates theological considerations. Basically, we would like to suggest that what God has given us, through our created natures but also reinforced and defined through Biblical revelation, are human relational forms that serve as metaphors for human/divine relationships. These metaphors act in a manner somewhat similar to the myths, in that they work subconsciously but pervasively to mold our cultural forms; yet, unlike the myths, they are based not on unrealities, but on the supra-reality of God himself.

This perspective represents an inversion of the thesis sometimes forwarded by sociologists that our claims about God derive solely from a projected image of our own self-understanding. Here it is as though God has projected patterns from his world into ours, not in the metaphysical sense described by Plato, but in order to communicate truths about our relationship to him. To be sure, our language about God never goes beyond the natural contexts from which any human language is developed. But it does not necessarily follow that all of our spiritual potential can be contained within those linguistic limits; in other words, we might easily understand a human reference to express metaphorically what a “divine vocabulary” would more adequately describe. Even as Christ in his parables chose the familiar to convey deeper truths, so the Creator may well have inscribed pictures of his larger kingdom into the human instincts which generate our earthly social forms, in order that we might more fully comprehend his nature and purposes.

Probably the most easily recognized metaphor is that of God as father. Feminism has objected in various ways to the masculine bias this appears to contain, but in fact their objections are usually misapplied, since we are not being asked to identify with a father, but rather with sons or daughters of a father. Our earthly childhood is thus designed in its ideal form to demonstrate on a small scale the love and provisions and protection and guidance that God wants to give us unconditionally as his children.

An easy test of this hypothesis would be to compare our various actual relationships with our human fathers (i.e. our experiences of being “fathered”) with our adult subconscious attitudes toward God (even if we have never been taught to regard him as Father). For example, consider the child whose father is too busy to listen, or one whose father is weak, or who demands perfection, or who doesn’t keep his word, or who treats the child’s problems as insignificant, or who turns his anger on his child—or who isn’t there at all. How many times do modern children-turned-adults find God hard to believe in, or to trust, or to see as loving and accepting, because for them the metaphor was incomplete or distorted or missing altogether? Feminism’s solution, to deny the validity of seeing God as father, only stands to lose touch with the powerfulness of God. To reject the father nature of God might well conform to their experience of a poor or absent human father (experience, we recall, being their criterion for truthfulness), but it in no way negates their inborn need for a father. Of course, we may mature beyond our need for earthly fathering (although it is questionable whether such maturing really occurs unless we *have* been properly fathered by strong and loving men)—nonetheless, there is evidence that none of us (male or female) “outgrows” our need for the security and meaningfulness of a spiritual child-father relationship. Thus if we are for whatever reason unable to know God as father, we might easily be drawn to the surrogate fathering of science or a political leader or an ideological power or a cultic religion.

The more important metaphor however for the purposes of this paper is that which pictures a marriage relationship between Christ and his church. At its most fundamental level, human marriage is motivated by an innate incompleteness felt by both sexes which draws them to seek a counterpart, in relationship with whom they might create a whole that is greater than the sum of the individuals. Hence the meaning of my femininity is never so fully realized as it is when I interact with the masculinity of my husband. Likewise, motivated by the dynamics of our sexual commitment, the non-sexual aspects of our personalities are also clarified and enhanced as in our love we seek to discover and draw out the totality of each other's gifts and creative capacities.

Such a shining, golden ideal Elizabeth Janeway might be forced to call a myth, in that it has no apparent ground in most human experience. Still, the longings are within us, perhaps most forcefully as dreamy-eyed youths, later to be tempered by the "realities" of normal adulthood. As Janeway herself comments,

The appeals that are made to [sex] in fiction, good and bad, films, good and bad, and commercial advertising represent an attempt to reach for the depths of emotional truth which still exist within us, what Dostoevski called the springs of life.⁵²

Thus feminism's endeavors to diminish the power of sexuality in human relationships might even been seen as an effort to refute our spirituality, our need for transcendence. To deny our essential partialness as men and as women is to ignore the message of the metaphor: that there is in each of us a deeper spiritual partialness which can only find completion as we enter into relationship with God.⁵³

There may, however, be additional significance in the marriage metaphor, beyond its depiction of our incompleteness. It is not happenstance that Christian literature portrays Christ as the bridegroom and we as his bride. His is to be the masculine, serving authority under which we humans (both male and female) will be freed to discover the unlimited joys of our own created and creative natures. We might note that the ideal for marriage described by Paul in the fifth chapter of Ephesians charges the husband to love the wife, but does not specify that the wife love him. Her only required task is submission. When the metaphor is extended back to its original source, we see that it is our experience of the unconditional love of Christ which in fact motivates any love to him, or to each other (see I John 4:19). His love is given to us on the basis of his relationship to us as bridegroom, or in other words, we are loved not because we deserve to be loved, but because we are his bride. Similarly, our submission to his authority cannot demand that he demonstrate his reliableness first; rather, if we desire to be related to him as bride, our trusting submission is the "terms" of that relationship.

I realize that this kind of discussion is far removed from the pattern of thinking familiar to many who are attracted to feminism. One can choose to interpret the phenomena of human sexual responses as being solely the product of sociological and biological circumstances, or one can view them as being fundamentally grounded in and reflective of transcendent spiritual realities. Neither choice can be forced. But it is personally helpful to me to perceive that those romantic longings that linger just beyond every human's conscious experience of this world may in fact be more than myths which are understood to be generated primarily out of human fears and inadequacies. The Golden Age may in reality be the Kingdom of God, and if, as Jesus claimed, it is now at hand, then perhaps we should not be surprised to discover it to be most fruitfully present in the intimacy of family and community relationships.

NOTES

-
- ¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 118, 124f.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-193.
- ⁴ Rosemary R. Reuther, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary R. Reuther (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), pp. 163-165.
- ⁵ Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1971), 105.
- ⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, pp. 174ff.
- ⁷ Rosemary R. Reuther, "Women's Liberation in Historical and Theological Perspective," in *Women's Liberation and the Church*, ed. Sarah B. Doely (New York: Association Press, 1970), p. 27.
- ⁸ Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, p. 42.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, chapters 4 & 5
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 281f.
- ¹¹ Sheila D. Collins, *A Different Heaven and Earth* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1974), p. 52.
- ¹² Arianna Stassinopoulos, *The Female Woman* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1973), p. 32.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- ¹⁵ Rosemary R. Reuther, *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 26.
- ¹⁶ Collins, *A Different Heaven and Earth*, p. 37.
- ¹⁷ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 92f.
- ¹⁸ Stassinopoulos, *The Female Woman*, pp. 93-101.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

-
- ²⁰ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 99. See also Collins, *A Different Heaven and Earth*, pp. 16f.
- ²¹ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, pp. 10, 96.
- ²² Reuther, *New Woman; New Earth*, pp. 158f.
- ²³ Steven Goldberg, *The Inevitability of Patriarchy* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1973/74), p. 45. 24.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ²⁷ Janeway, *Man 's World, Woman's Place*, p. 26.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ³⁰ Midge Decter, *The New Chastity and Other Arguments Against Women's Liberation* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1972); p. 44.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- ³⁴ Stassinopoulos, *The Female Woman*, p. 30.
- ³⁵ Decter, *The New Chastity*, p. 56.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ³⁷ Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), p. 205.
- ³⁸ Os Guinness, "Radical Exodus from Cultural Containment," an unpublished speech delivered in Mansfield, Ohio in 1973.
- ³⁹ William S. Banowsky, *It's a Playboy World*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1969), p. 57.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴³ Stassinopoulos, *The Female Woman*, p. 161.

⁴⁴ Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, p. 284.

⁴⁵ Banowsky, *It's a Playboy World*, p. 68.

⁴⁶ For additional discussion, cf. James Dobson, *The Strong-Willed Child* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978).

⁴⁷ E.g., Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, pp. 217, 256, 277; Reuther, *New Woman/New Earth*, pp. 26, 26, 205 ff.

⁴⁸ Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, p. 277.

⁴⁹ George F. Gilder, *Sexual Suicide* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 18f.

⁵⁰ Goldberg, *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, chapter 2.

⁵¹ See above, p. 16.

⁵² Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, p. 195.

⁵³ This is an adaptation of a concept expressed by Judith Miles in *Journal from an Obscure Place* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Press, 1978), pp. 66-68.