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Introduction to "Man as Male and Female"

The question of gender and of gender relationships is a central concern of human existence. One's gender is a constitutive reality of each person. Whether man or woman, each of us lives and relates *as* a man or *as* a woman. Given the foundational importance of gender, it is not surprising that the Holy Scriptures have given significant testimony to the reality of gender, to the relationships that arise out of gender distinctions, and to the boundaries that are implicit in gender distinctions.

The Scriptures begin with the creation story, and the creation of Adam and from Adam of Eve is the apex and culmination of that story. One might say that the story of creation was told in order to introduce Adam and Eve as husband and wife. The "one flesh" of "bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh" is the narrative intention of the whole account. Not coincidentally, therefore, the destiny of mankind is depicted as a union of man and wife, of Christ and His church, and the final vision of Revelation has the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. We would do well not to regard these images as mere metaphor. Such images depict the destiny of human life precisely in these marital terms. That is to say, the relationship of man and of woman lived in the world and in the present age bears within it and is image of final and ultimate human meanings. Such relationships are not to be peripheralized nor eviscerated of their internal and intrinsic significance.

Yet, a full biblical accounting of the fundamental reality of man and woman remains outstanding. Precisely the breadth of the theme within the scriptural documents presents the commentator with very great challenges. Furthermore, as St. Paul expresses it, it is a "mystery" of Christ and His church. Mysteries, by their nature, are difficult to comprehend in a single, all-encompassing notion. They must be articulated, as it were, from all sides. Yet, mysteries are not simply gaseous and spiritualized realities. Mysteries reveal themselves in concrete and particular realities. The "mystery" of which Paul speaks is the union of man and woman in a union of love, and it is a "mystery" because it bears within itself, and so points beyond itself, to another union, that of Christ and His church.

It is the very great merit of Dr. Nathan Jastram's study, "Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God," that it does not shrink from the comprehensive task of beholding the breadth and depth of the biblical witness concerning our human natures as man and woman. In doing so, Dr. Jastram is attentive to the deep relationality of our gender distinctions. The very terms "male" and "female," or "man" and "woman," are meaningless unless the other is considered and, indeed, entailed in each. A "man" is a "man" only in terms of the reality of another who is "woman." Not everyone will agree with everything Dr. Jastram has to say

of this mystery. But the breadth of his argument and the vigor of his scholarship commends this study for the reading and consideration of anyone who wishes to think seriously about the mystery that is man and woman together.

Dr. Jastram insists, moreover, that the mystery of man and woman is rooted not only in the destiny of a new humanity as the Body of the Christ. He believes that Christian reflection on this mystery will say something important also concerning God Himself, who is not alone but is Himself, according to His own nature, in relation. There is no God other than the God who is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Dr. Jastram's discussion on this important, yet quite controverted, topic is stimulating and, I believe, "on to" an important truth that all too often is dismissed as pure speculation. Yet, mankind was created after the image and likeness of God, and so one might well expect the reality of mankind to bear the marks of its Creator. I know of no other study that so thoroughly and consistently develops the theme of man and woman through the notion of the image of God. Jastram argues that the idea of image and likeness is much more pervasive in the scriptural testimony than is often allowed. The reader will judge for himself how far in this he wishes to follow the author. However, I would be surprised if any thoughtful reader were not challenged to consider again the biblical narrative in view of this thought-provoking and significant study.

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