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MUCH ATTENTION has focused in recent years on members of Roman Catholic women's religious communities who have sought and have held public office. Several of these women[1] were asked by the Vatican to resign from office (or to withdraw from the electoral process) because of a perceived conflict between their holding of political office and their membership in a religious community. To many observers the Vatican directives appeared consistent with earlier moves against priests in political office;[2] moreover, they seemed to be in accord with the opinions of John Paul II, who from the earliest days of his pontificate had strongly urged priests (and at times members of religious communities) to abstain from partisan political activity. To a group of priests at Rome, to priests at Puebla, and then in a separate address to women in religious congregations, at Puebla, John Paul had stated:

> You are priests and members of religious orders. You are not social directors, political leaders, or functionaries of a temporal power. So I repeat to you: Let us not pretend to serve the gospel if we try to "dilute" our charism through an exaggerated interest in the broad field of temporal problems. Do not forget that temporal leadership can easily become a source of division, while the priest should be a sign and factor of unity, of brotherhood. The secular functions are the proper field of action of the laity, who ought to perfect temporal matters with a Christian spirit.[3]

[1] The best known of these are Agnes Mary Mansour, in her position as director of the Michigan Department of Social Services; Arlene Violet, attorney general of Rhode Island; and Elizabeth Morancy, member of the Rhode Island legislature. See Madonna Kolbenschlag, ed., *Between God and Caesar* (New York: Paulist, 1985); idem, *Authority, Community and Conflict* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1986), for analysis and documentation of their situations.

[2] E.g., Robert Drinan, the representative from Massachusetts, and Ernesto Cardenal, Fernando Cardenal, and Miguel d'Escoto, in the government of Nicaragua. See Kolbenschlag, *Between God and Authority*, as well as "Nicaragua," *Documentation catholique* 82 (1985) 364.

[3] There are slight variations in the texts in these three addresses. This quotation is from "A Vision of the Priest's Role," *Origins* 8, no. 34 (Feb. 15, 1979) 548-49; see also "Address to the Roman Clergy," ibid. 8, no. 25 (Dec. 25, 1978) 399-400; "Address to Scottish Priests," ibid. 12, no. 4 (June 10, 1982) 62; "The Priest," ibid. 12, no. 40 (March 17, 1983) 641.

The prohibitions against the participation of religious and clergy in politics, and John Paul's statements about religious and clerical life and politics, are obviously interrelated. However, while it is important to note the connection among these topics, it is equally important that similarities not obscure the different issues at stake. For clergy and religious vary in their roles in the Church and in society; one cannot assume that the same strictures against political activity should apply to both of them. In this article I will focus on the role in politics of Roman Catholic women who are members of religious communities (henceforth WRC),[4] seeking to distinguish it from the clerical task. Specifically, I will argue that the question of WRC needs to be considered in light of three topics: first, general statements about women in the Catholic tradition; second, Catholic social teaching about the public and private spheres of human life; and third, contemporary discussions (political, philosophical, and theological) about the relationship between the public and private spheres of human life. For my treatment of the Catholic tradition, I will limit my remarks to magisterial (papal, conciliar, and synodal) documents from Leo XIII to the present. An analysis of magisterial documents on these subjects will show, I think, that some of the arguments used for restricting WRC from access to political office (or from, to use an expression that has become popular in these religious communities, "political ministry") rest on questionable premises about the nature of women and about the public and private dimensions of human life. Furthermore, such analysis will identify—although in broad strokes—some of the inconsistencies in argument about political and personal life which trouble magisterial Roman Catholic accounts of social ethics.

CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Already there are in the literature about WRC and politics a number of articles which allude to the differences between clergy and members of religious communities. These include canonical, ecclesiological, and theological, in addition to what I refer to as procedural, arguments. For example, in "Priests and Religious in Political Office in the U.S.: A Canonical Perspective," James Provost[5] surveys the canonical differences between clergy and religious, and their implications for political activity. Provost traces the history of the prohibition against political activity by clerics and religious, and then compares and contrasts the treatment that this subject receives in the 1917 and 1983 Codes of Canon Law. He summarizes the history of this proscription, prior to the 1917 code, in

[4] I know that I neglect male members of religious communities who are not priests, but I think the question of WRC warrants specific attention.

[5] In Kolbenschlag, *Between God* 74–103. See also Rosemary Smith, S.C., "Political

these terms: "1. Clerics were, in general, forbidden to hold political office; they were to devote themselves full-time to religious concerns. 2. The same was true of religious, *and on an even stronger basis* because of their religious commitment to *concerns beyond this world.*"[6] Both Codes contain this interdiction. Provost reports that, in the 1917 Code, by canon 592 "religious, whether clergy or not, were bound by the same prohibitions"[7] as clergy, while in the 1983 Code it is canon 672 which performs this function.

Canonically, religious institutes are characterized by "public vows," "life in common," and "separation from the world." Apostolates (or ministries) of religious communities may be adjusted to the times, "yet even individual apostolates are to be carried on in the name and by the mandate of the Church." Provost argues that this "would appear to be an added restriction on religious becoming involved in political activities or holding public political office."[8]

Provost also contends, however, that historically there were always exceptions to the general prohibition; canon law "is more flexible than a surface reading of the canons themselves might indicate."[9] Such exceptions could allow individual members of religious communities to seek political office as part of their individual apostolates. But he acknowledges as well that, because of the difference between permission and dispensation, the new Code of Canon Law is stricter about this subject than the 1917 Code.

Pertinent ecclesiological as well as theological examinations of the differences between clergy and religious have been provided by Joseph Komonchak and Francine Cardman.[10] Komonchak discusses the theological implications of the clergy/laity distinction in light of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. He points to a twofold (canonical and hierarchical) difference between clergy and laity, but acknowledges that this "neat twofold distinction is disturbed by the presence of religious who may be either clergy or laity in the canonical sense."[11]

To elucidate this distinction, Komonchak explores the Council's view of the relationship of the Church to the world, and the implications of this for understandings of clergy, religious, and laity. But there are

Involvement and the Revised Code," ibid. 104–14.

[6] Ibid. 80, my emphasis.

[7] Ibid. 81.

[8] Ibid. 91.

[9] Ibid. 75.

[10] See Joseph A. Komonchak, "Clergy, Laity, and the Church's Mission in the World," in Kolbenschlag, *Between God* 149–73, and Francine Cardman, " 'Religious' and 'Lay' as Statuses within the Church," in Kolbenschlag, *Authority*, 38–43. The other articles in these books also provide interesting theological and ecclesiological perspectives.

[11] In Kolbenschlag, *Between God* 151.

"obscurities" and "difficulties"[12] in the church-world and clergy-laity discussions of the Council; Komonchak argues that "if the autonomy of the world . . . must be called into question, then so must the allocations of typical responsibilities to clergy, religious, and laity . . . . What is really needed is a return to the original opposition which did not counterpose clergy and laity, but the whole Church, clergy, religious, *and laity* to the world."[13] In response to questions about political ministry, Komonchak accepts that there are different roles and gifts within the Church, but argues that "these differences will not be based on some mythical pre-political religious meaning."[14]

Cardman is troubled that, once Agnes Mary Mansour moves from religious to lay life, she is no longer a problem to the Church. Cardman asks: "Is there a difference in the public and ecclesial character of Christians' lives, according to their status in the church?"[15] Cardman depicts the position of WRC in the Church as ambiguous; they are frequently "subsumed under the clerical portion" but technically remain lay persons:

> Where religious fall in this apportionment of reality is not entirely clear. As laity, it is to be expected that their lot would logically be with the secular; but because of the assimilation of religious to so many of the conditions of the clerical state, they tend to be regarded as belonging to the realm of the sacred. For all practical purposes, canon law pertaining to religious (in the new code of 1983 as well as in the 1917 code) treats them more or less as clerics. The net result of this ambiguity is that religious are subject to most of the disadvantages of both states, while sharing few of the privileges of either.[16]

Cardman, like Komonchak, notes that misunderstandings of the church-world, sacred-secular relationships contribute to this confusion, and calls for careful re-examination of these important themes.

What I refer to as procedural questions (although they are more than that) have been raised by those who argue that decisions about women's religious communities should not be made by groups composed of men only, but should be made by women themselves. I will explore one aspect of this type of argument later in this essay, in relationship to the discussion of assessments of women's nature.

In contemporary canonical, theological, ecclesiological, and procedural discussions, then, there are those who suggest that the roles of religious

[12] Ibid. 163.
[13] Ibid. 169.
[14] Ibid. 170.
[15] In Kolbenschlag, *Authority* 39.
[16] Ibid. 39–40.

and priests (as well as of laity) in politics warrant reconsideration. Such warrant is extended, I will argue, by an analysis of the magisterial tradition's exposition of the role of women in private and public (including political) life.

WOMEN IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIFE: MAGISTERIAL TEACHINGS

Women in Religious Congregations

An examination of the Roman Catholic magisterial documents from Leo XIII to John Paul II demonstrates that women religious are a minor theme in this tradition, especially in contrast to the pre-eminence of priests. In the early part of this tradition—in the writings of Leo XIII, Pius X, and Pius XI, e.g.—tremendous emphasis is placed on the contribution that the priest makes, not only to the well-being of the Church but also to the well-being of the larger society.

From Leo XIII's *Depuis le jour* (1899) to Pius X's *Haerent animo* (1908), to *Ad catholici sacerdotii* (1935) of Pius XI, to *Menti nostrae* (1950) of Pius XII,[17] one learns that the priesthood is a "supernatural institution superior to all those of earth,"[18] "the most important and most delicate of all tasks to which a man may be applied for the benefit of his kind."[19] Pius XI concludes that "All the good that Christian civilization has brought into the world is due, at least radically, to the word and works of the Catholic priesthood."[20] Furthermore, while laity and members of religious congregations receive more attention and more detailed consideration from the time of Pius XII onward, later pontiffs continue to laud the special glories of the priesthood. For example, John XXIII speaks of the "sublime dignity of the priesthood, which is superior to any other role in life, however noble or difficult these other roles may be,"[21] and John Paul II reminds Dutch bishops that "to the priesthood is due, in fact, a pre-eminent consideration. The experience of the church from the most ancient times shows how much relevant importance this vocation has always had for the fruitful functioning of the entire organism of the body of Christ, how much it is indispensable for it."[22]

[17] In Claudia Carlen, I.H.M., ed., *The Papal Encyclicals 1740-1981* 2 (Raleigh: McGrath, 1981) 455-64; Vincent A. Yzermans, ed., *All Things in Christ: Encyclicals and Selected Documents of Pius X* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1954) 229-38; Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 3, 497-516; and Odile Liebard, ed., *Clergy and Laity* (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1978) 49-87, respectively.

[18] Leo XIII, *Fin dal principio*, in Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 2, 512, no. 3.

[19] Leo XIII, *Depuis*, in Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 2, 456, no. 5.

[20] *Ad catholici sacerdotii*, in Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 3, 502, no. 26.

[21] *Grande e*, in *The Pope Speaks* 8 (1962-63) 25.

[22] "A Letter to the Dutch Bishops," *Origins* 10, no. 37 (Feb. 26, 1981) 579.

Elsewhere I have maintained that there are three major arguments against priestly participation in politics in these magisterial documents.[23] These involve issues of *mission*, *competence*, and *unity*. That is, the Church has a supernatural mission to witness to the spiritual and to save souls; the Church's competence in politics is limited to the range of its capacity to interpret the natural law; the unity of the Church is threatened by political divisiveness. The priest, as representative of the Church, must act in ways consistent with church mission, competence, and unity; this precludes his participation in the arena of partisan politics. My conclusion is that changing understandings of the spiritual and temporal call into question some of these traditional arguments against priestly participation in politics. While these three issues may well undermine prohibitions against WRC in politics, my contention in this essay is that there are additional reasons to question this proscription.

There is some overlap between the arguments against priestly and against religious involvement in politics, although it is difficult for two reasons to distil from the tradition an application of these three arguments to WRC. First, many of the documents describe religious life for men as well as for women (when the underlying concerns are often, as we shall see, very different). Second, in contrast to the prominence of priests, reflection on WRC is a lesser theme in the magisterial tradition. It is usually the *first* claim—that women in religious life *witness* to the eternal—that undergirds interdictions of office-holding. Religious do contribute to church *unity*, but this function is not usually linked to the political question. And while religious are praised for their work in education, theirs is not the official *teaching* role of the priest.

An explanation for the limited treatment of WRC in papal documents is provided by Margaret Farley and the late Emily George in a paper entitled "Canonical Regulation of Women's Religious Communities: Its Past and Its Future."[24] They point to significant differences between the history of women's religious communities and that of men's. Attempts to impose cloister on all women's communities—at the same time that male communities were moving toward more active apostolates in the world—left WRC in a position, both in the Church and in the world, disparate from that of their male counterparts. Farley and George argue that historically the status of WRC in the Church has been influenced by attitudes toward women in the surrounding environment; the movement to cloister women was paralleled by the "general tendency to

[23] "The Integration of Spiritual and Temporal: Roman Catholic Church-State Theory," *TS* 48 (1987) 225–57.

[24] Unpublished manuscript, n.d.

privatize women in western culture."[25]

Farley's and George's history reminds readers that it was only in 1900 that *Conditae a Christo* "gave canonical recognition to women's apostolic religious congregations"[26] and acknowledged "that a religious congregation of women is capable of and has a right and responsibility to self-governance."[27] In Mary Ewens' words, *Conditae a Christo* "finally gave official recognition to the hundreds of active congregations that had sprung up in the nineteenth century in response to the need for works of charity outside cloister walls."[28]

Note that *Conditae a Christo* was issued 22 years after the beginning of Leo XIII's pontificate (1878) and nine years after the issuance of his landmark encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891). By 1900 Leo had already completed six of the seven documents which John Courtney Murray identifies as containing Leo's major Gelasian texts on the relationship between church and state.[29] And of Leo's major church-state encyclicals, only *Graves de communi re* (1901) was written later than *Conditae a Christo.* It is not surprising, then, to find that WRC are peripheral to the general discussion—and especially to the discussion of public life and of political life—in the early years of what is now considered modern Catholic social teaching.

One of Leo XIII's major statements on religious life is *Au milieu des consolations* (1900),[30] issued shortly after *Conditae a Christo.* In that document he discusses the life of Christian perfection as it relates to the evangelical counsels. He speaks of religious life as a double ministry: both to care for the eternal well-being of souls and to help those in misery. In *En tout temps,* issued June 29, 1901, Leo refers to religious of both sexes as the "elite in the City of God,"[31] because they carry Christian

[25] Ibid. 10. Mary Ewens, O.P., "Political Activity of American Sisters before 1970," in Kolbenschlag, *Between God* 41–59, states that cloister was "based on the notion that women were weak, emotional beings who were incapable of serious thought or of controlling their own lives. Enclosure regulations were aimed at keeping religious women behind convent walls and limiting their contact with the world beyond them so as to protect nuns from the evils that lurked there" (42). Ewens notes that in practice this could prevent women from leaving the convent at night, from teaching boys older than ten, from going to Mass in the parish, etc.

[26] "Canonical Regulation" 20. See text of *Conditae a Christo* in *Lettres apostoliques de S.S. Léon XIII* 6 (Paris: Bons Livres, n.d.) 171–83.

[27] Ibid. 21.

[28] Ewens, "Political Activity" 42.

[29] John Courtney Murray, "Leo XIII: Separation of Church and State," *TS* 14 (1953) 145–214, esp. 192–200. *Pervenuti* was written in 1902.

[30] *Lettres apostoliques* 6, 184–91.

[31] Ibid. 235, my translation.

virtues to the height of perfection.

As the century progresses, women (and the laity) receive amplified attention in the tradition, and with them WRC. There is, e.g., a growing body of popes' addresses to WRC in Rome and elsewhere. When the pontiffs do describe religious life, they note the centrality of the evangelical counsels. Poverty, chastity, and obedience are marks of religious life; they are elements in a life of Christian holiness and of Christian perfection. Through their vows religious offer a witness—usually spoken of as a public witness—of holiness to the Church and to the world. During these years, then, central themes are struck that make it almost unthinkable for WRC to hold public office or to function in the secular sphere in any way that compromises a distinctive witness to a sacred, spiritual, otherworldly sphere.

For example, in *Menti nostrae* (1950) and *Sacra virginitas* (1954), Pius XII explores the import of religious life and of the counsels of perfection for women as well as men. In *Sacra virginitas* he declares that the celibacy of both priests and religious contributes to their capacity to live a life distinct from that of the laity. While married people are divided between love of God and love of spouse, religious are able to devote themselves to their relationship with God. They are able "to aim only at the divine; to turn thereto the whole mind and soul; to want to please God in everything, to think of Him continually, to consecrate body and soul completely to Him."[32] We have seen that John XXIII accentuates the priesthood, but he asserts as well the "superiority of the priestly and religious vocations over other states of life."[33] Again, it is their vows which set religious apart; their life of prayer, sacrifice, and detachment from the world is a witness to the rest of the Church.

Religious life is explored at length in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially in *Lumen gentium* and *Perfectae caritatis.* Chapter 6 of *Lumen gentium* recognizes the evangelical counsels of religious as "signs" of the kingdom of God to the rest of the Church: "the religious state by giving its members greater freedom from earthly cares more adequately manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below."[34] *Perfectae caritatis* characterizes members of religious congregations as a "blazing emblem of the heavenly kingdom."[35] Paul VI depicts religious life as a sign that reminds Christians that temporal well-being is not the ultimate goal of the human person, and attests to the transcendent, to the eschatological, to Christian belief

[32] In Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 4, 241, no. 15.

[33] Address of April 13, 1959, in *Documentation catholique* 55 (1958) 586, my translation.

[34] *LG,* no. 44, tr. from Walter M. Abbott, S.J., and Joseph Gallagher, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild, 1966) 75; see also nos. 31 and 42 (*Documents* 57, 71–72).

[35] *PC,* no. 1 (*Documents* 466).

that "Christ's kingdom is not of this world."[36] This witness of religious distinguishes them from the laity, whose major characteristic is their secularity.

John Paul II commends this witness given by religious; their consecration is an act of total love for God, which is a valuable testimony to society. Religious life is characterized by "total consecration to God, prayer, witness to the future life, and pursuit of holiness."[37] Religious garb is part of this public witness; this is one of the reasons that John Paul vigorously praises it.

A later section of this essay will examine the pontiffs' utterances about the nature of women. But one aspect of these arguments is noteworthy here. John Paul asserts that WRC bring special qualities as women to their vocation. He instructs them: "You have the capacity to make the Church present with a really maternal face, with sensibility and affection, with wisdom and balance."[38] This maternal countenance of women equips them in a special way for religious life in the Church: "This apostolate is usually discreet, hidden, near to the human being, and so is more suited to a woman's soul, sensitive to her neighbor, and hence called to the task of a sister and mother. . . . 'Be spiritually mothers and sisters for all the people of this church.' "[39]

Throughout this magisterial tradition popes and bishops advocate a proper balance between the spiritual and temporal dimensions of human life. What constitutes proper balance becomes clear in the frequency with which both priests and religious are warned against immersion in the world. It is this concern which undergirds prohibitions against participation in "worldly" politics. In this tradition, then, spiritual commitments can set limits to temporal, including political, activity.

In many of his writings Pius XII warns against the "heresy of action." In his addresses to WRC, Pius compliments the good works they accomplish. He acclaims them for works of mercy; for contributions to education and nursing; for care for the sick, the elderly, the poor, and the needy; for aid to children (especially girls); for teaching catechetics; for relief from suffering; and for their achievements in the missions. (He praises them as well for their religious habit and their modesty.) But while these activities are commendable, they do not constitute the heart of religious life. It is union with God, in charity, that is the center of religious life.

John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II also caution against overinvolvement by WRC in the world. Paul judges religious life not by its

[36] *Magno gaudio affecti*, in *The Pope Speaks* 9 (1963-64) 398, my emphasis.
[37] *Na alegre*, in *The Pope Speaks* 26 (1981) 72–73.
[38] "Address to Women Religious in Costa Rica," *Origins* 12, no. 40 (March 17, 1983) 647.
[39] "Religious Women: Living Signs," *Origins* 9, no. 6 (June 28, 1979) 89.

social contributions but by its consecration to God. In an address to superiors of religious orders, Paul urges WRC not to be ensnared by the "ephemeral" and the "changeable." "Like the priest and the male religious—but with a different perspective from theirs—the woman religious is faced with a terrible dilemma: either to be a saint, totally and without compromise, and attain the greatest measure of sanctity possible; or to be reduced to a joke, a caricature, an unsuccessful and, let us say, abortive being. The dangers of secularization are evident. . . ."[40] Paul recalls the proper balance between this world and the next when he states: ". . .it is a mistake to want to laicize religious life itself; the mistake is not in bringing women religious closer to individuals or to human problems, which is obviously desirable, but of allowing the easy-going ways of the world to creep into their lives."[41]

A recurring theme of John Paul II is that religious must be concerned primarily with who they are and only secondarily with *what they do*: "the value of their activity is great, but the value of their being religious is greater still."[42] Therefore the "vertical dimension" (being united with God in prayer) is more important than worldly activity. John Paul interprets the new Code of Canon Law to state that the "first and principal duty of all religious is the contemplation of things divine and constant union with God in prayer. . . . The code insists that the apostolate of all religious consists primarily in the *witness* of their consecrated life."[43]

It is as part of this general concern about priorities that the prohibition against political office arises. It is within this context that John Paul proclaims the proscriptions of political involvement, at times to priests, at times to WRC. To one group of WRC he states: "Do not be deceived by party ideologies. Do not succumb to the temptations presented by options which might one day demand the price of your liberty. Trust in your pastors and be always in communion with them."[44]

There are a number of documents on religious life (of which several are published by the Vatican Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes), promulgated during the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II, which summarize the goals and purposes of religious life and illustrate the themes of public witness and of the priority of being over doing. These include *Evangelica testificatio, Mutuae relationes, Religious Life and Human Promotion, Redemptionis donum,* and *Norms for Religious Life.* Of these, *Religious Life and Human Promotion* provides a

[40] Address of Nov. 22, 1969, *The Pope Speaks* 14 (1969) 365.
[41] Address of Nov. 19, 1973, *The Pope Speaks* 18 (1973-74) 316.
[42] "Address to U.S. Bishops," *Origins* 13, no. 18 (Oct. 13, 1983) 320.
[43] Ibid. 319, my emphasis.
[44] "Costa Rica" 647.

concise resume of the argument against the participation of WRC in politics. It states that, while religious can participate in politics in the broad sense, they cannot enlist in partisan political activity. For the contribution that religious make to politics is their witness to the absolute, as well as their work in education and formation. Such nonpartisan activity demonstrates that they are "peacemakers and promoters of fraternal solidarity." That type of work will be beneficial to women: "... religious women are encouraged to persevere in their undertakings for the advancement of women, thus leading to the *acceptance of women in those areas of public life*, in addition to Church life, *which best correspond to their nature and talents.*"[45] In *Religious Promotion and Human Development* exceptions to this rule are permitted in specific cases, "when extraordinary circumstances call for it."

An examination of some major documents in the magisterial tradition from Leo XIII (or at least from 1900) to John Paul II elucidates the current prohibition against WRC holding political office. That is, concerns for public witness and for the vertical dimension of religious life outlaw such activity in all but exceptional cases. However, in studying this history, one should be alert to Farley's and George's assertion that the history of WRC in the Church has been influenced by attitudes toward women in society. Farley and George conclude:

> Presuppositions, then, regarding the inferiority of women, their need for control, their susceptibility to evil human tendencies on the one hand and superficiality on the other, their need to transcend their sexuality and the things of this world, importantly shaped the institutional relationship between the church and women's religious communities. However culturally determined such presuppositions were, they remain troubling reminders of the limits and risks of this relationship. They also suggest, of course, that *radical shifts in these presuppositions could entail a profound change in the nature of the relationship.*[46]

An additional way to gain perspective on the role of WRC in the Church, then, is through a more detailed examination of the role of women in church and society. As part of this task, let us turn now to examine the tradition of the hierarchical magisterium's attitude toward women, specifically toward women in public life.

Women and Public Life

When one investigates the magisterial tradition—especially the early part of it—for insights about women, one notices, as Christine Gudorf argues, that "...the largest portion of the papal teaching on woman is

[45] Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, "Religious Life and Human Promotion," in Kolbenschlag, *Between God* 430, my emphasis.

[46] "Canonical Regulation" 36–37, my emphasis.

not incorporated in the major social teaching documents; most of it is not even found in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis.* The great bulk of papal teaching on women is in the form of addresses to groups of women (especially Italian women) visiting the Vatican. There are no similar addresses to men on the nature of men, of fatherhood, and of masculinity."[47]

In the official magisterial assessment of women, there are three lines of argument that are important for our purposes. The first of these is that women possess a nature different from that of men; the second is that women's nature links them in a special way to the family; the third is that women's role in public life is affected by the special familial, or maternal, role natural to them.

Statements about women precede *Conditae a Christo,* for Leo XIII wrote about the family early in his pontificate. In 1880, in *Arcanum,* his encyclical on marriage, Leo uses the "head" imagery to convey the husband's ruling role in the family, and states that the woman "must be subject to her husband and obey him."[48] Women are different from men; their nature suits them to a type of work (primarily in the family) dissimilar to that of men. In his famous encyclical *Rerum novarum,* Leo asserts that "work which is quite suitable for a strong man cannot be rightly required from a woman or a child. . . . Women, again, are not suited for certain occupations; a woman is by nature fitted for home-work, and it is that which is best adapted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing-up of children and the well-being of the family."[49] Such a distinction between men's and women's natures is suggested as well by the famous head/heart distinction of Pius XI in *Casti connubii.* Pius argues that man is the head of the family, while woman is the heart; this means that the man has the "chief place in ruling" while the woman has the "chief place in love."[50]

One of the results of these descriptions of women's nature is a pontifical wariness about encouraging women to be too active in public affairs. Pius XI supports some civil rights for women (as long as they are in accord with women's nature), but he alerts Christians to the danger of letting women devote themselves to public affairs. For they are "false teachers" who suggest that a woman should abandon her work with the family and "be able to follow her own bent and devote herself to business and even public affairs." Such activity could lead to "debasement"; "false liberty

[47] *Catholic Social Teaching on Liberation Themes* (Washington: Univ. Press of America, 1981) 255. Gudorf provides a thorough analysis of women in the magisterial tradition in chapter five.

[48] In Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 2, 32, no. 11.

[49] Ibid. 2, 252, no. 42.

[50] Ibid. 3, 395, no. 27.

and unnatural equality with the husband is to the detriment of the woman herself," and leads even to "slavery."[51] One of the aspects of communism that Pius XI derides in *Divini redemptoris* is that therein woman "is withdrawn from the family and the care of her children, to be thrust instead into public life and collective production under the same conditions as man."[52]

Pius XII discusses the role of women in modern society in a number of his addresses to groups of women. Some changes from his predecessors' views occur during Pius' pontificate, although he still accepts many of their ideas about women's nature. For women are different from men; they are distinguished above all by their vocation to motherhood. This call to motherhood shapes the entire existence of women. Their characters and personality traits are affected by it; Pius notes women's kindness, gentleness, sensitivity, and fine feeling. Motherhood changes the outlook of the woman, for "a woman who is a real woman can see all the problems of human life only in the perspective of the family."[53] All women (including WRC) are called to motherhood, whether physical or spiritual. WRC are depicted by Pius as sorrowful that they are not physical mothers; priesthood and fatherhood are not treated in the same way.

But women's public role in society is in transition, according to Pius XII, although he at times greets this news with regret. But eventually he concedes that in a changed society women must move into public life; they must play a public role *as women*. That means, e.g., that they must bring their feminine personality traits and their feminine concerns about the family to public work. Pius XII exhorts women to join the public sphere so that they can protect the family against all those who, in the midst of an era of social instability, would destroy it.

Pius argues, then, that no field should remain closed to women, including politics, but that woman's work must always be undertaken in accord with her nature. When women and men collaborate in public life for the good of the state, therefore, Pius argues that they make different contributions: "But it is clear that if man is by temperament more drawn to deal with external things and public affairs, woman has, generally speaking, more perspicacity and a finer touch in knowing and solving delicate problems of domestic and family life which is the foundation of all social life."[54]

A final point about Pius XII's treatment of women's public activity. While he acknowledges its importance, he does not describe it as the

[51] Ibid. 3, 402–3, nos. 74–75.

[52] Ibid. 3, 539, no. 11.

[53] Address of Oct. 21, 1949, in Yzermans, *Addresses* 1, 68–69. See also Address of Sept. 13, 1951, ibid. 1, 146–51.

[54] Ibid. 72.

vocation of all women. In fact, most women will remain at home with the family. Pius gives preference for public careers to women who are neither "held down by cares of family or education of children, or subject to the holy yoke of rule." That is, it is providential that, after the destruction of the Second World War, women "whom events destined to a solitude which was not in their thoughts or desires, and which seemed to condemn them to a selfishly futile and aimless life"[55] can now be of service to other women by entering civil and political life.

After the pontificate of Pius XII, new roles for women in society are noted and endorsed in some of the major magisterial documents. For example, there are texts in *Pacem in terris, Humanae vitae, Gaudium et spes, Octogesima adveniens,* and *Laborem exercens,* among others, which recognize the burgeoning participation of women in society. (It is listed as one of the signs of the times in *Pacem in terris.*) Frequently these texts are linked to an affirmation of the rights of women, and of their equal dignity to men. There are statements as well which oppose unjust discrimination against women in civil society. Indeed, John XXIII and Paul VI commend Christianity for its contributions to such progress.

But these statements about women hinge upon the concept of women's distinct nature. Ever present are assertions about the importance of women to the family, and the family's and society's need for women's presence in the home. The pontiffs oppose economic policies which prohibit women from working at home with their children. Women's rights in the public sphere, then, are affirmed along with the importance of their vocation in the home.

Thus John XXIII describes women as "equal in dignity" to men, and yet "ordained by God and by nature for a different task." Because women are "directed immediately or remotely toward maternity" their nature is loving, giving, and disinterested.[56] John recognizes the movement of women toward the outside, public world, but urges them not to let this contact destroy their "inner life." The world needs women to bring their "maternal sensibilities" to bear upon it. For John asserts that the natural purpose of women is motherhood—even if they do not in fact become mothers.[57] The balance is suggested by John's statement in *Pacem in terris* that "women have the right to working conditions in accordance with their requirements and their duties as wives and mothers."[58]

[55] Ibid.

[56] "Nous sommes particulièrement," *The Pope Speaks* 6 (1959–60) 331.

[57] See "Ci è gradito," *The Pope Speaks* 7 (1961) 171–72, and "Convenuti a Roma," ibid. 345.

[58] In Joseph Gremillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976) 205, no. 19.

The same theme of a role suitable to women's nature is discussed in *Gaudium et spes:* "Women are now employed in almost every area of life. It is appropriate that they should be able to assume their full proper role in accordance with their own nature. Everyone should acknowledge and favor the proper and necessary participation of women in cultural life."[59] Like his predecessor and the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI attests both the right of women to take part in public life and their principal role as mothers. "Women also have the right and the duty to take part in the political and administrative work of society. This participation offers them the possibility of making a direct contribution to the renewal of social institutions, *in particular where marriage, the family, and the education of children are concerned.*"[60] Women have special qualities (e.g., intuition, creativity, sensibility, piety, compassion, and a capacity for understanding); Christians should not downplay their differences with men:

> We do not have in mind that false equality which would deny the distinctions laid down by the Creator himself and which would be in contradiction with woman's proper role, which is of such capital importance, at the heart of the family as well as within society. Developments in legislation should on the contrary be directed to protecting her proper vocation and at the same time recognizing her independence as a person, and her equal rights to participate in cultural, economic, social, and political life.[61]

In his *Apostolic Exhortation on the Family* John Paul decries the lack of access by women to public life, for their "equal dignity" justifies their access to public functions.[62] But invariably he urges respect for the maternal and familial roles of women. In *Laborem exercens,* he suggests that work and family need to be harmonized. While women possess the same right as men to be in the public realm, they should not be forced to work outside the home. He exhorts Christians to overcome a mentality which values work outside of the home more than work in the home. It "will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother . . . to devote herself to taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs."[63]

[59] *GS,* no. 60 (tr. Abbott and Gallagher, *Documents* 267); see also no. 52 (*Documents* 257).

[60] "To the Peoples of Africa," in Gremillion, *The Gospel,* 425, no. 36, my emphasis.

[61] *Octogesima adveniens,* in Gremillion, *The Gospel* 491–92, no. 13.

[62] *Origins* 11, nos. 28 and 29 (Dec. 24, 1981) 438–68.

[63] In Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 5, 318, no. 91. For critical analyses of this argument, see Gregory Baum, *The Priority of Labor* (New York: Paulist, 1982) 78–79, and Andrea Lee, I.H.M., and Amata Miller, I.H.M., "Feminist Themes and *Laborem exercens,*" in Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., eds., *Readings in Moral Theology, Number Five: Official Catholic Social Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 411–41.

In the 20th century, then, the magisterial tradition yields to the idea of a public role for women. But that public role is always required to be consistent with woman's nature, different from man's nature, identified by the pontiffs. Some insight into the range of that public role for women and for men, as well as into the weaknesses of that formulation, can be gained from a brief exposition of what the pontiffs mean by public life.

Public-Private

At the same time that the pontiffs prohibit WRC from certain political activities and urge other women into public life consistent with their feminine natures, they propose a complex social theory which addresses the interrelationship of the public and private spheres of human life. That theory, when viewed apart from the subject of women, affirms themes of consistency between private and public spheres which seem to contradict the statements about women. I cannot provide here a detailed examination of the magisterial tradition's treatment of the public and private realms of human life (including the family). What I will do instead is to adumbrate that theory by identifying a limited number of texts which represent the major arguments of the tradition about the public and the private. Such a use of quotations cannot replace a full analysis of the tradition, and it runs the risk of "proof-texting." However, the four citations I have chosen are central to the tradition; they have received extensive commentary, with full context provided, elsewhere. Some remembrance of their claims, even in this brief overview, can illuminate our examination of the roles of women in public and private life.

First, in *Pacem in terris* John XXIII discusses the morality of the public and private spheres, and proclaims:

> The same moral law which governs relations between individual human beings serves also to regulate the relations of political communities with one another.
>
> This will be readily understood when one reflects that the individual representatives of political communities cannot put aside their personal dignity while they are acting in the name and interest of their countries; and that they cannot therefore violate the very law of their being, which is the moral law.[64]

John's is a natural-law argument, which recognizes a consistency between the private and the public realms. For John XXIII (and for the tradition he represents) there are not two moralities (or one realm of immorality and another of morality). Both public and private are created by God and are ordered by God to a common end; both are therefore subject to the same moral standards.

[64] In Gremillion, *The Gospel* 218–19, nos. 80–81.

Second, in *Octogesima adveniens,* Paul VI declares: "While scientific and technological progress continues to overturn man's surroundings, his patterns of knowledge, work, consumption, and relationships, two aspirations persistently make themselves felt in these new contexts, and they grow stronger to the extent that he becomes better informed and better educated: the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation, two forms of man's dignity and freedom."[65] Paul's insistence on equality and participation recalls new emphases on democracy in the magisterial tradition from the time of Pius XII onward, and the gradual rejection of the hierarchical ordering of human persons favored by Leo XIII and Pius XI. In response to the ravages of the Second World War, Pius had recognized the need for citizens to participate in their destinies.[66] John XXIII had identified in *Pacem in terris* the "right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one's part to the common good."[67] This accentuation of participation is accompanied by respect for the increasing importance of the political sphere. In modern life, therefore, persons must participate in the political life of their countries and thus contribute to the common good.

Third, in his *Apostolic Exhortation on the Family* John Paul avers "that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family"; when one supports the family, one is "contributing to the renewal of society and of the people of God."[68] Just as the private and public realms are consistent with one another, so the major encyclicals on the family (e.g., *Arcanum, Casti connubii, Humanae vitae*) describe it as the fundamental unit of society. It contributes to the well-being of society, and the state must defend and protect it. Once again, the tradition upholds not discord or disharmony of aims, but institutions working together for individual and common good.

Fourth, in his second encyclical, *Dives in misericordia,* John Paul praises mercy and its effect on social justice. He argues:

> In reciprocal relationships between persons merciful love is never a unilateral act or process. Even in the cases in which everything would seem to indicate that only one party is giving and offering, and the other only receiving and taking (for example, in the case of a physician giving treatment, a teacher teaching, parents supporting and bringing up their children, a benefactor helping the needy), in reality the one who gives is always also a beneficiary. In any case, he too can easily find himself in the position of the one who receives, who obtains a benefit, who experiences merciful love; he too can find himself the object of mercy.

Thus, mercy becomes an indispensable element for shaping *mutual relationships*

[65] Ibid. 496, no. 22.
[66] See especially his Christmas Addresses, in Yzermans, *Addresses* 2.
[67] In Gremillion, *The Gospel* 206, no. 26.
[68] *Origins* 11, nos. 28 and 29 (Dec. 24, 1981) 439, no. 3.

between people in a spirit of deepest respect for what is human and in a spirit of mutual brotherhood.[69]

John Paul's discussion of mercy and mutual relationships is reminiscent of discussions about agape which have been central to 20th-century Christian ethics. In *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* Gene Outka identifies three ways of thinking about agape that characterize Christian theologians in our century. These categories are equal regard, self-sacrifice, and mutuality. Outka argues that for those who support agape as mutuality "some notion of communication and sharing is involved. Love refers, in part or altogether, to a quality of relation *between* persons and/or groups. Those actions are loving which *establish* or *enhance* some sort of exchange between the parties, developing a sense of community and perhaps friendship."[70]

This quotation from *Dives* is a reminder that mutuality is at the heart of Roman Catholic understandings of love and justice, both in its magisterial documents and in much of its theology. (It is primarily Catholic authors who fall into the mutuality category in Outka's book.) In his conclusion Outka suggests that equal regard may be more appropriate to a social ethic than mutuality.[71] But John Paul proposes mutuality as the norm for social as well as for personal relationships. Such a standard recollects *Pacem in terris*: in the Roman Catholic magisterial tradition private and public ethics are consistent with one another. There is one morality, and the standard of mutuality applies in personal as well as social ethics.

In summary, the Roman Catholic magisterial tradition prohibits WRC from partisan political activity; allows other women to undertake public/political activity, but urges that this work remain consistent with women's nature; and identifies a woman's nature as equal to, but distinct from, that of men. Moreover, standards of participation, of mutuality, and of consistency between public and private and between family and society characterize contemporary Roman Catholic social thought. Our

[69] *Origins* 10, no. 26 (Dec. 11, 1980) 413–14, nos. 141–48, my emphasis. The text also states: "An act of merciful love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment that we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from the people who are accepting it from us. If this bilateral and reciprocal quality is absent, our actions are not yet true acts of mercy, nor has there yet been fully completed in us that conversion to which Christ has shown us the way by his words and example, even to the cross, nor are we yet sharing fully in the magnificent source of merciful love that has been revealed to us by him."

[70] New Haven: Yale University, 1972, 36.

[71] "... certain advantages accrue, I think, if equal regard rather than social cooperativeness remains as the most central feature of agape" (ibid. 285). These include a radical equalitarian element as well as more stability.

first two tasks, then—viewing WRC in light of magisterial statements about women and about the public and private—are complete.

It begins to be clear that suspicions about public tasks for all women play a key role in the magisterium's prohibition of political office for WRC. For WRC have been denied those public functions in the Church which were permitted to priests, and have also been prohibited from a public political role in society. And even as an integrated view (on the part of the official magisterium) of temporal and eternal, of public and private concerns grew in theory, there was little attention to changes in practice for women in general or WRC in particular. There are other considerations as well—including contemporary discussions about the public and private and about women's nature—which call into question the magisterial arguments. An overview of these discussions and of their implications for our topic forms the third and final section of this essay.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE: CONTEMPORARY FORMULATIONS

An adequate portrayal of the relationship between the public and private dimensions of human life has been the goal of many contemporary philosophers, theologians, political scientists, and sociologists. Such projects can shed light on some of the questions raised by the magisterial tradition about private and public, women and men.

Feminism: The Personal Is Political

One source of insight which has fostered interdisciplinary thought about the public and the private has been feminist theory. Even at an epigrammatic level, one of the major themes of feminist thought has been that "the personal is the political." That is, feminists in a variety of disciplines have opposed all attempts to "privatize" women, attempts frequently based on perceptions of women's nature. Contemporary feminists have in large part opposed dualistic understandings of the human person which identify women with the private and men with the public realm of human life. There has been disagreement among feminists on these matters (with feminists on different sides about the concept of women's nature), but at the very least they agree that women must participate in any process which attempts to define human nature, especially women's nature. Women must contribute as well to the discussion of women's and men's roles in the private and public spheres of human life.[72]

[72] For some contemporary treatments of the public and private in feminist thought, see Carol C. Gould, "Private Rights and Public Virtues: Women, the Family, and Democracy," in Carol C. Gould, ed., *Beyond Domination* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983) 3–20; Linda Nicholson, "Feminist Theory: The Private and the Public," ibid. 221–30.

The history of mainstream theological, philosophical, psychological, and other accounts of women's nature is by now well known and has been traced by competent scholars in a number of disciplines. Philosophers, theologians, and psychologists have reminded us, e.g., that the human capacity for morality has often been perceived as linked to rationality, and that women human beings have frequently been characterized as less rational, and thus less moral, than men. So we have been told, e.g., that Aristotle argued that "the deliberative faculty in the soul is not present at all in a slave; in a female it is inoperative, in a child undeveloped"; that his interpreter in the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, identified women as "defective" and "misbegotten" (although not misbegotten for the "work of generation"); that Sigmund Freud argued that women show "less sense of justice" because "they are more influenced in their judgments by their feelings of affection or hostility."[73] One could proceed at length with such quotations. But what we have learned from these studies is that suspicion about women (about their lack of rationality, and therefore their questionable judgment, especially about justice) joined to appreciation of certain qualities of women (usually their capacity to reproduce) has in the past kept women segregated in the private sphere, separated from public roles and from political leadership.

Often women's role in public and political life has been limited by arguments that women are not inferior but rather morally superior to men. For example, historians remind us that in the years following the Industrial Revolution much of women's work was removed from the public workplace and was relocated in the private home. It was on the basis of an emergent "cult of domesticity" or "cult of true womanhood" that women were identified as the guardians of the home, and the home became a "sanctuary," a safe place, constructed by women, in which men could escape from the horrors of the working world. Once again the separation of public and private spheres was enforced, and women were identified with the private, men with the public.

But, as Rosemary Radford Ruether has noted, this form of link between women and the private realm is sustained by the belief that women are "'too pure,' too noble, to descend into the base world of work and politics."[74] Ruether cites Cardinal Gibbons on the subject of women's

[73] Aristotle, *Politics* 1, chap. 13; Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, 92, 1; Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (1925), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, tr. and ed. James Strachey, 19 (London: Hogarth, 1961) 257–58.

[74] The quotation from Ruether continues: "To step out of her moral shrine to work or to vote, to attend universities with men, and mingle with them in the forums of power is to sully her virtue and destroy instantly that respect which accrues to her in the 'sanctuary'

suffrage (which he opposes). He asks:

> Why should a woman lower herself to sordid politics? Why should a woman leave her home and go into the street to play the game of politics? ... Why should she long to rub elbows with men who are her inferiors intellectually and morally? Why should a woman long to go into the streets and leave behind her happy home, her children, a husband and everything that goes to make up an ideal domestic life? .... When a woman enters the political arena, she goes outside the sphere for which she was intended. She gains nothing by that journey. On the other hand, she loses the exclusiveness, respect and dignity to which she is entitled in her home. .... Woman is queen, but her kingdom is the domestic kingdom.[75]

In her account of the struggles of 18th- and 19th-century feminists, Carolyn Korsmeyer insists that one of the barriers they had to overcome was the popular idea that women and men inhabit different spheres of morality and therefore practice different virtues. She states:

> Considered too weak physically to venture into the world outside the home and too deficient in reason to make important decisions, the woman was relegated to the domestic sphere where, under the guidance and direction of her rationally superior husband, she tended house, raised children, and gave her family comfort and pleasure. Correspondingly, her "virtues" were the outgrowth of her sensitive, yielding nature: kindness, humility, gentleness, protectiveness, and so on.[76]

Such weaknesses could be easily co-opted, and such virtues could be easily corrupted in the public arena.

In the past, then, arguments about women's nature (whether that nature is assessed as inferior or superior to men's) have served to exclude women from the public realm and to connect them in special ways to the private. Because so many assessments of their nature have emphasized women's reproductive capacities, women have been especially identified with the family.

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of the home"("Home and Work: Women's Roles and the Transformation of Values," in Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., ed., *Woman: New Dimensions* (New York: Paulist, 1977) 76. This article provides an analysis of this whole cult of domesticity for women. See also Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Effect of Industrialization on the Role of Women in Society," in Carol Robb, ed., *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics* (Boston: Beacon, 1985) 42–53.

[75] In Ruether, "Home and Work" 77.

[76] "Reason and Morals in the Early Feminist Movement," in Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky, eds., *Women and Philosophy: Toward A Theory of Liberation* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1976) 98–99. For other treatments of the question of women, rationality, and morality, see Sandra Harding, "Is Gender a Variable in Conceptions of Rationality?: A Survey of Issues," in Gould, *Beyond Domination* 43–63; Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982).

Women's Nature and the Family

Political scientist Susan Moller Okin, in *Women in Western Political Thought*, points to the effect that linking women to private, family life has had on Western political theory.[77] Okin traces the thought of major figures—Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Mill—and contends that women are treated differently from men in their writings because of their assessment of women's role in the family. Okin demonstrates that each of these authors uses a different standard of interpretation for male human nature than for female human nature. In other words, their writings about women have been dominated by functionalist understandings of women's nature. Okin argues that Plato at times rejects this functionalist view; but this occurs when he dismantles the traditional family (which he later reintroduces in the second-best society of the *Laws*). Even John Stuart Mill, celebrated as a feminist, fails to escape this perspective; Okin argues that Mill accepts the immutability of the family and of some of women's roles within it. Okin concludes that the predominant model of interpretation of women in Western political thought is functionalist; that those who refuse to question family structure have viewed women in terms of their sexual and reproductive capacities; and that authors' attitudes toward the family determine their attitude toward women.[78]

In her theological and ethical analysis of the role of the family in Christianity, Margaret Farley attributes some of that tradition's tendency to devalue the family in comparison with a celibate lifestyle in religious community to the fact that it was identified as woman's sphere. "The family, it seems, is not the place where the important work of the world or of the kingdom of God is done."[79] Farley asserts that women have been given a "double message" about the family: to transcend it, but also to perceive it as their special call. In a statement parallel to Okin's claims about the Western political tradition, Farley argues that in Christian thought the family is different for women and for men: "The family is a *refuge* for men, and hence the object of *eros*, a *selfish* love. But it is the *responsibility* of women, and hence the place of *self-sacrificial love*, of unlimited Christian *agape*."[80]

[77] Princeton: Princeton University, 1979.

[78] Even the title of a book by another political scientist, Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1981), suggests the dichotomy between thought about men and women in the tradition. Elshtain examines figures different from Okin, but points to the same linking of women to the family.

[79] "The Church and the Family: An Ethical Task," *Horizons* 10 (1983) 63. The other two sources of inferiority are the this-worldliness of the family, when transcendence is valued, and a general suspicion about sexuality.

[80] Ibid.

Proposals for Reformulation: Women's Experience and Agape

In response to misconstruals of women's nature, feminist theorists have called for reformulation of traditional understandings of women's nature as linked to the family, and of the relationship of the public and private spheres. The proposals for such reconstruction vary. For feminists offer a variety of proposals about women's nature, and a range of suggestions about the family. Typologies or schemes of classification for the different types of feminism and the implications they have for family and for society abound. If one looks at contemporary feminist literature on the family, one can identify a radical feminist position, which argues that women will remain oppressed as long as they bear children, and calls for reproductive technology as a means of liberation for women. There are as well socialist feminists and liberal feminists, who argue that the application of socialist or liberal economic and political theories to the family is necessary to the family's well-being. There are feminists who argue for a new appreciation of traditional women's values and a recognition of their superiority to men's values. There are feminists who argue that women should espouse traditional male values; there are feminists who support more androgynous models of society and of the family in which both men and women participate in both private and public realms.[81]

Common to these proposals, however, is reflection on *women's experience*. Farley asserts that a feminist ethic "includes a focal concern for the well-being of women and a taking account of women's experience as a way to understand what well-being means for women and men."[82] An example of such use of women's experience is the feminist theological discussion of agape. That analysis has been influenced by the 1960 article of Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View."[83] Saiving

[81] See, e.g., Alison M. Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg Struhl, *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978); Alison Jaggar, "Political Philosophies of Women's Liberation," in Mary Vetterling-Braggin, Frederick A. Elliston, and Jane English, eds., *Feminism and Philosophy* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1977) 5–21; idem, "Human Biology in Feminist Theory: Sexual Equality Reconsidered," in Gould, *Beyond Domination* 21–42; idem, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983); Carol C. Gould, "The Woman Question: Philosophy of Liberation and the Liberation of Philosophy," in Gould and Wartofsky, *Women and Philosophy* 5–44; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston; Beacon, 1983) chap. 3; Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

[82] "Feminist Ethics," in James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986) 229.

[83] In Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979) 25–42.

argued that women's experience is different from that of men; the basic sin of men might be pride, but that of women is self-abnegation or sloth. Naming pride as the primary violation of agape could harm women, since women need to learn a proper self-assertion and a proper self-love. Saiving worried that if women take seriously injunctions against the sin of pride, they will "strangle" the impulses toward self necessary for their development.

In response to Saiving, as well as to Outka's analysis of agape, some feminists have argued that self-sacrifice cannot serve as the standard of Christian love for women. For women have been harmed by self-sacrifice, have been kept from full development and full participation by their adherence to self-sacrifice as a moral standard. What many contemporary feminists endorse instead is a standard of agape as mutuality, a type of relationship in which both parties love and are loved, which allows one to be concerned or loving toward the self while also caring for others, or, as Beverly Wildung Harrison describes it, "love that has both the quality of a gift received and the quality of a gift given."[84]

Feminists insist that the norm of mutuality has important implications for women's roles in church, society, and family. For Farley, it leads to "new patterns of relationship" between men and women. We have seen that Farley argues that the family has been the realm of self-sacrificial love for women but not for men. Attention to the experience of women, and to mutuality, requires a change in moral standards for the family. "The true importance of the family will be seen when it has neither subordinate importance for men nor predominant importance for women, but when it takes its place along with other key human enterprises, the task of men and women, the concern of the whole church."[85] So do both Okin and Jean Bethke Elshtain, another political scientist and author of *Public Man, Private Woman*, call for reformulation of traditional relationships between the public and private spheres. Elshtain calls for a renewal of the private, a "redemption of everyday life"[86] which also presupposes equal participation by women in the public sphere. Okin argues that "Women cannot become equal citizens, workers, or human beings—let alone philosopher queens—until the functionalist perception

[84] "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in Robb, *Making the Connections* 18. See also Margaret A. Farley, R.S.M., "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution," in Burghardt, *Woman* 51–70; Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Our Right to Choose* (Boston: Beacon, 1983); Christine E. Gudorf, "Parenting, Mutual Love, and Sacrifice," in Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer, eds., *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985) 175–91; Margaret Farley, "Feminist Theology and Bioethics," ibid. 285–305; Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "Agape in Feminist Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9 (Spring 1981) 69–83.

[85] "The Church and the Family" 63.

[86] *Public Man, Private Woman* 335.

of their sex is dead."[87] She concludes that women will not be included in Western political thought without a reconstruction of the family and its relationship to politics.

Okin acknowledges that such re-examination of the family will call into question the foundations of liberal political thought. For while that theory is apparently based on claims about humans as individuals, she argues that it in fact presupposes the family and certain roles for women within the family. Thus an investigation of the public-private question in liberal political theory becomes essential.

Liberal Political Theory and the Public-Private

Feminists are not alone in questioning traditional definitions of the public and the private. Nor is Okin the only author to point out weaknesses in the foundations of liberal political theory. For example, much of the discussion in and about *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* by Robert Bellah et al. revolves around the relationship between the public and private dimensions of human life. In the introduction the authors state: "Taking our clue from Tocqueville, we believe that one of the keys to the survival of free institutions is the relationship between private and public life, the way in which citizens do, or do not, participate in the public sphere."[88] Bellah et al. demonstrate that Americans at times construct a sharp dichotomy between public and private and worry that too much individualism can wreak havoc with these dimensions of human life. "In public life as in private, we can discern the habits of the heart that sustain individualism and commitment, as well as what makes them problematic."[89]

Bellah et al. suggest that a new integration of these spheres is necessary. Such an integration would recognize the importance of dignity and autonomy, but would avoid the dangers of fragmentation. In the new integration, persons would "link interests with a conception of the common good."[90] One way to begin this transformation of public and private life, the authors suggest, is with a less brutal ethic of work—an ethic of work that recognizes the importance of the private sphere of human life.

[87] *Women in Western Political Thought* 304.

[88] New York: Harper and Row, 1985, 7. The other authors are Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. For other books which raise the question of the public/private relationship, see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977), and William M. Sullivan, *Reconstructing Public Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986).

[89] *Habits* 163.

[90] Ibid. 287.

A less frantic concern for advancement and a reduction of working hours for both men and women would make it easier for women to be full participants in the workplace without abandoning family life. By the same token, men would be freed to take an equal role at home and in child care. In this way, what seemed at first to be a change only in the nature of work would turn out to have major consequences for family life as well.[91]

In the new arrangement, the authors hope, Americans would gain greater respect for the public sphere (e.g., by losing some of their suspicion of politics) along with an improved family and private life.

A compelling review of the public-private dichotomy in liberal thought is Robert Paul Wolff's "There's Nobody Here but Us Persons." Wolff argues that the liberal conception of the human person "implies a fundamental distinction between the private and public spheres of life."[92] The private is the area of individuals (or households) in which there are distinctions among persons (of sex, age, etc.); the public space is entered by private individuals who are to be "undifferentiated." Wolff asserts that the public-private distinction is not as neat as these definitions would suggest. For if one accepts that split, one "shove[s] into the private sphere, out of sight and out of consideration, everything that makes a person a human being and not merely a rational agent."[93] With the separation of spheres and the location of reproduction in the private realm, the roles of women and men in society are distorted. Wolff argues that "to demand that the public world of work and politics be blind to age, sex, race, and so forth precisely *is* to equate the most essential facts of my human self with relatively trivial facts of my tastes and preferences, and to consign them all to the private world where they will have no influence on *important* public policies and decisions.[94]

Wolff portrays his own experience—as professor and parent and spouse, in relationship to a woman who is also professor, parent, and spouse—to highlight the difficulties of the public-private arrangement and to show that persons are both private and public individuals. He then offers four possible resolutions of the problem. First, one could accept the public-private split and change the criteria of admission into each sphere. Second, one could accept the dichotomy and carry it to its logical conclusions. Third, society could make *ad hoc* adjustments which would soften the impact of the public-private separation, or fourth, it could struggle against it. At the same time Wolff admits:

[91] Ibid. 289.
[92] In Gould and Wartofsky, *Women and Philosophy* 134.
[93] Ibid. 136.
[94] Ibid. 137.

But I must confess that I don't know what those words mean. I cannot now form a concrete conception of a set of social arrangements which would, at one and the same time, respect the nature of each person as a rational moral agent, and also sustain and support each man and woman in a natural human way along the life cycle from birth, through childhood, young adulthood, maturity, old age, to death.[95]

Contemporary liberal thought about the public and the private exemplifies the difficulties in relating the public and private to women and men in a coherent and fair manner. It illustrates the same difficulty highlighted by feminist theory—the conceptual confusion surrounding private and public once certain assumptions about men's nature and women's nature are questioned. One way to characterize these developments is to state that they suggest that one is left with a fundamental ethical question: whether or not there is a social theory capable of treating both women and men as both private and public persons.

CONCLUSIONS: WRC AND PRIVATE-PUBLIC LIFE

We are by now a long way from Agnes Mary Mansour, Arlene Violet, and Elizabeth Morancy and the prohibitions against their participation in partisan political activity. But unless their situation is examined in light of the public-private distinction, the significance of their exclusion from political life cannot be understood.

An initial public-private argument about WRC is, of course, a strictly ecclesiological one. That is, one could compare women's public role in the Church with that of men. The denial to women of the public roles of the priest—with his public symbolization of the Church and Jesus Christ—perpetuates the dichotomy of women as private and men as public persons. For even if the priest is excluded from public political office, he still has available a public ecclesiastical function. WRC are denied both.

But I have argued that such ecclesiological arguments are insufficient for our consideration. For service in public office raises ethical as well as theological questions, problems political as well as ecclesiological. Public service by women provokes substantive and procedural questions about the nature of women and women's experience. For that reason I have argued that the role of WRC in politics must be examined in light of magisterial statements about women and about the public and private, as well as contemporary insights into the public and private.

When one examines these issues in conjunction with one another, it becomes noticeable that the exclusion of WRC from political office recalls

[95] Ibid. 143–44.

earlier suspicions in the Roman Catholic magisterial tradition about women's participation in the public arena. It focuses attention as well on the past and present statements about women's special relationship to the family. For we have seen that even though the magisterium no longer prohibits or questions the participation of women in politics, it continues to favor a special role for women in the family, due to their maternal natures. Such linkages of women to the family run the risk of establishing dichotomies between the public and private roles of women and men, with women still "more private," "less public" than men. The exclusion of WRC from politics re-enforces such dichotomies.

An additional difficulty is that the Roman Catholic magisterial tradition affirms the consistency of the public and private spheres of human life, accentuates participation in political life, refuses to view the family as a strictly private institution, and asserts a norm of mutuality for interpersonal as well as social ethics. In this ethic the Roman Catholic magisterial tradition is responsive in many ways to the concerns of contemporary feminist and liberal theorists. Thus Roman Catholic social thought appears poised to offer a constructive response to those opposed to the disintegration of public and private life, or to a privatization of morality or of human persons. It finds itself in agreement with those who call for a new respect for the private sphere, for work in the home and in the family. From this perspective its division of women's life from men's life, in the family, in society, and in the Church, and its neglect of women's participation in assessments of human nature, are problematic according to its own criteria. With such standards one must call into question accounts of human nature which carry overtones of a separation between public and private. For a dichotomy of *persons'* roles in public and private may in fact promote a division between public and private *realms* of human life. So, too, could different roles in family (eros for men? agape for women?) and in society for women and for men undermine mutuality as the norm for human relationships.

The question of WRC in politics, then, with all of the assumptions that stand behind it, forces a re-examination of Roman Catholic social ethics. For it is not yet clear if the Roman Catholic magisterial tradition—with its affirmation of public-private consistency, participation, well-being of the family, and mutuality—offers an ethic that affirms both women and men as both public and private persons. For the application of those norms may be unduly restricted if it is exclusive of certain groups of persons, or if it is based on perceptions of human persons challenged by those who are perceived.