Leadership University *Reprint*

Reprinted from First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life • June/July 1992 • Number 24

Marriage in Counterpoint and Harmony

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If one were to seek a connecting thread that runs through the biblical witness, a good candidate would be "faithfulness." Robert Jenson has written that faithfulness is "the theological heart of the Bible," and that, in turn, marriage is "the paradigm case of an ethic of faithfulness." But in a creation marred and distorted by sin, this faithfulness is always threatened. The sword is placed not only at the entrance to the garden but also between the sexes-and, even, between husband and wife. What Karl Barth characterizes as our "being-in-fellow-humanity," our creation as male and female signifying that we are made for covenant community with each other (and, ultimately, with God), becomes a source of misunderstanding, tension, rivalry, and anger. As the curse of Genesis 3:16 puts it: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Marriage is, therefore, a sphere of life in which we must struggle to enact our faithfulness. Here we learn what a price permanent, faithful commitment to just one person who is completely other than ourself may exact. Nevertheless, in this earthly bond we are called to image the love God wills for the creation and bestows upon humankind in Jesus. "This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). Of course, not all are called to marriage, and Barth is correct to see in it the typical but not necessary expression of our being-in-fellow-humanity; yet, in this bond many-perhaps most-of us begin to learn the meaning of mutuality in love.

It has, therefore, become something of an embarrassment that the biblical words which most clearly establish Christ's faithful love for the church as paradigmatic for the marital bond, words that depict the bond of husband and wife as one of mutual love in which equal submits to equal "out of reverence for Christ," should also be words that enjoin the husband to be Christlike by being "the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church." If, however, we want to explore the meaning of marriage as a sphere of faithfulness, a covenant community in which a man and a woman begin to learn the meaning of faithful obedience, it is imperative that we consider the problems raised by these words in Ephesians 5. Any full treatment of marriage would, of course, be far more extensive, but our concern is a narrow one: to explore the bond between husband and wife in which they attempt to forge a union in which each submits to the other but neither tries to occupy the place of the other. The standard set forth in Ephesians 5 seems to suggest that within a partnership of mutual subjection there will be different roles to play. The union of husband and wife is to be a sharing among those who remain as different as their biological structures are different, though as complementary as those biological structures are complementary.

This is certainly not the only kind of union we might imagine. Consider an alternative very nicely displayed by Dorothy L. Sayers in one of her detective stories, *Gaudy Night*. The story is far more than a mystery, and one of its central themes is the relationship between Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane. He had once saved her life when she was unjustly accused, and she is now unable to avoid the feeling that she owes her life to him. Wimsey is madly in love with Harriet, but she fears commitment, believing that it must inevitably involve dependence and loss of self. She will out of a sense of obligation give herself to him if he wishes, but then, of course, it will not be the kind of giving he desires. Eventually the two elements in the plot-the mystery and the love story-come together. Wimsey, determined not simply to possess Harriet, permits her to endanger herself and risk her life investigating the mystery. He resists the impulse to solve it for her-as, it turns out, he could have-and in so doing offers back the life she felt she owed him.

This is more than a touch of romance to spice up a story; it is Sayers' depiction of the ideal relationship between a man and a woman. In one musical metaphor, in particular, she brilliantly captures her ideal. Peter is being his most eccentric self-playing the piano and singing to Harriet while waiting for a shopkeeper to box a chess set he has bought. Harriet joins in. They begin singing some of Morley's *Canzonets for Two Voices*. Peter tells Harriet that she can sing "Whichever part you like-they're exactly the same."

> "This kind of thing," said Peter, as tenor and alto twined in a last companionable cadence, "is the body and bones of music. Anybody can have the harmony, if they will leave us the counterpoint."

Sayers returns to this musical image at the end of the story, shortly before Harriet accepts Peter's proposal. They attend a concert at which Bach's Concerto in D Minor for two violins is being played. Wimsey is absorbed in the music. Harriet knew enough, herself, to read the sounds a little with her brains, laboriously unwinding the twined chains of melody link by link. Peter, she felt sure, could hear the whole intricate pattern, every part separately and simultaneously, each independent and equal, separate but inseparable, moving over and under and through, ravishing heart and mind together. She waited till the last movement had ended and the packed hall was relaxing its attention in applause.

> "Peter-what did you mean when you said that anybody could have the harmony if they would leave us the counterpoint?"
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> "Why," said he, shaking his head, "that I like my music polyphonic. If you think I meant anything else, you know what I meant."
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> "Polyphonic music takes a lot of playing. You've got to be more than a fiddler. It needs a musician."
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> "In this case, two fiddlers-both musicians."
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> "I'm not much of a musician, Peter."
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> "As they used to say in my youth: 'All girls should learn a little music-enough to play a simple accompaniment.' I admit that Bach isn't a matter of an autocratic virtuoso and a meek accompanist. But do you want to be either? Here's a gentleman coming to sing a group of ballads. Pray silence for the soloist. But let him be soon over, that we may hear the great striding fugue again."

The point is clear and the image a memorable one. In counterpoint two independent melodies interweave. It does not offer the independence of the soloist; yet the unity it offers is quite different from that of harmony. Neither of the independent melodies in counterpoint depends upon the other; that is, each could stand alone as an independent piece. Yet, together they are in some way enriched. Harmony, by contrast, suggests a kind of interdependence; neither part could very satisfactorily stand alone. And it is counterpoint, not harmony, that Sayers offers as an image for the proper relation of husband and wife.

This provides us with a clear-and alluring-alternative to the one seemingly presupposed in Ephesians 5. It is alluring precisely because it offers an image by which we can envision the bond of husband and wife as a union involving genuine exchange, yet a union of two equal and independent beings. Is this good enough for Christian thought? It may, of course, have to be. Certainly it is better than some of the current alternatives available in our society. There is, for instance, a radical feminism that pictures the male/female relation as one of unrelieved oppression and that tends to be separatist over against men. Thus, for example, Janice Raymond has argued (*A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*, 1986) *against* a feminism that seeks equality of women with men. To aim at that is already to cast one's thinking in terms of "hetero-reality": the view that woman exists always in relation to man. Instead, Raymond argues, women must begin with the companionship of self and those like the self-with "the autonomy, independence, and love of the female Self in affinity with others like her Self-her sisters." About such an alternative, Christians who see in the community of male and female the paradigmatic expression of our creation for covenant community must say with philosophers Mary Midgley and Judith Hughes: "A project whose only live example is apartheid can scarcely be a hopeful one" (*Women's Choices: Philosophical Problems Facing Feminism*, 1983). Sayers, by contrast, offers a vision far more Christian, and it may be that in the years ahead we shall simply learn from experience whether it is adequate. Human reason may gradually come to understand more fully the meaning of our creation for co-humanity as male and female. In the present moment we can only think tentatively about the sort of union Sayers envisions, probing its fitness.

What, if anything, does it lack that a Christian understanding might need? What it lacks-and lacks intentionally-is an appreciation of marriage as communion between those who are not interchangeable and who in their otherness are interdependent. It is marriage so understood that begins to teach us the meaning of faithful commitment to that One who is The Other, for communion with whom we are created. In counterpoint the two melodies are joined, and their union is a lovely one, but either could stand alone as an independent piece. They are essentially interchangeable, as Peter says to Harriet: "Whichever part you like-they're exactly the same." The imagery cannot work perfectly for marriage, of course, since husband and wife are, at least, biologically other. What may give

Christians-and some who are not Christians-pause, however, is that the biological differentiation seems to count for so little here.

Christians have struggled often and in many different settings against their own recurring tendency to deprecate our creation as embodied beings. It has been a constant struggle to remember that we are to find personal significance in that embodied condition, to affirm and value it. And it is the body, the bodily differentiation between husband and wife, that signifies the extent and difficulty of the project they are called to undertake: to be faithful to one who is not a mirror of the self; one not fully fathomable; one who is harsh, resistant, other. To care about such a one, to be faithful to such a one, to be at peace in communion with such a one-that is the fundamental meaning of marriage and the task spouses undertake. It should be no surprise that we often flee the task-if not literally, then at least by refusing to let the spouse stand forth in his or her otherness. But in fleeing it we lose the meaning of embodiment, of our creation as male and female.

The image of counterpoint that I have drawn from Sayers can make relatively little of this biological differentiation-and, hence, of the task that flows from it. The distinction will, of course, play a role in reproduction, but the assumption-extraordinary if we think about it-seems to be that everything bodily about us could be different, yet everything remain the same in the cultural sphere. Every cell in our bodies is sexed; yet the human person-the real person-is thought of as untouched by such bodily influence.

Seeing this we begin to comprehend how deeply implicated is Sayers' ideal in the modern Western affection for individualism and autonomy. Thus, for example, Midgley and Hughes write: "We have a choice. We can either extend the individualism which has been a religion in the West since the eighteenth century consistently to *both* sexes, or we can admit its limitations, treat it with more caution, and put it in its place as only one element in a more realistic attitude to life for everybody." Thus also theologian Lisa Sowle Cahill characterizes the androgynous ideal as a new version of "the liberal ideal of the autonomous agent, unconstrained-indeed undefined-by any significant communal or physical boundaries" (*Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethic of Sexuality*, 1985).

And because it gives relatively little significance to our creation as embodied male and female, Sayers' vision inevitably transforms somewhat the task that marriage involves. The project is not that of shaping a union in which we learn the meaning of faithfulness to one who is other than ourself and in which, by being ourself and permitting the spouse to be himself or herself, we image our fellow-humanity; rather, the task is to gain the pleasures of submission without relinquishing independence. A difficult task, to be sure, but perhaps not clearly a school in which the meaning of faithfulness is as readily learned.

It is, of course, no great trick to discover something that may be lacking in a position. Far more difficult is finding a better alternative. We can consider both the promise and the problem of alternatives by looking at two such views. In each there is an attempt to make some sense of the "headship" Ephesians 5 ascribes to the husband and to explain its place even within a bond of equal partners. Consider the following two passages:

(1)

> The need for some head follows from the idea that marriage is permanent. Of course, as long as the husband and wife are agreed, no question of a head need arise; and we may hope that this will be the normal state of affairs in a Christian marriage. But when there is a real disagreement, what is to happen? Talk it over, of course; but I am assuming they have done that and still failed to reach agreement. What do they do next? They cannot decide by a majority vote, for in a council of two there can be no majority. Surely, only one or other of two things can happen: either they must separate and go their own ways or else one or other of them must have a casting vote. . . .
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> If there must be a head, why the man?. . . The relations of the family to the outer world-what might be called its foreign policy-must depend, in the last resort, upon the man, because he always ought to be, and usually is, much more just to the outsiders. A woman is primarily fighting for her own children and husband against the rest of the world. Naturally, almost, in a sense, rightly, their claims override, for her, all other claims. She is the special trustee of their interests. The function of the husband is to see that this natural preference of hers is not given its head. He has the last word in order to protect other people from the intense family patriotism of the wife.

(2)

> This freedom of decision granted to the wife, which frees her from the one-sided authority of the husband, cannot mean that the wife can make her decision in the name of her own individuality and its untrammeled development. On the contrary, she is bound to bring her work and the choice of her domicile into harmony with the primary obligation which is laid upon her by responsibility as a wife and mother. In this case her equality of rights can mean only that the husband cannot settle the question of the wife's working and domicile on his own authority, but rather that the wife makes this decision on her own responsibility. . . .

> The freedom granted to the wife by the principle of equal rights therefore cannot mean an emancipation from the marriage and the obligation to seek the building of a common will on the part of the spouses. Rather this freedom can mean only that this common will cannot be one-sidedly dictated by the husband, but must be achieved in partnership. . . .
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> These problems naturally come to a critical point in the borderline cases. What happens when a meeting of minds does not take place? What happens, for example, when the spouses make different decisions about two possible places to domicile? . . .
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> The . . . problem [of] the rearing of the children makes far more difficult . . . demands upon the interpretation and administration of the principle of equal rights. In this case too the problem becomes more acute in the borderline cases, namely, when united educational authority of the parents is jeopardized by differences of opinion between the married partners. . . .
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> In the "normal" cases it would be a matter of the parents' arriving at a common agreement through discussion. In the "borderline" cases, where there is disagreement, however, it would be inevitable that one of the parents should have the right to make the final decision. . . . At this point where a choice simply has to be made and where the exceptional character of a borderline situation prevails, a theological ethics cannot abstain from declaring, in line with the tradition of Christendom based upon the Holy Scriptures, that the father holds the final decision. Though it is true that the New Testament does not recognize any spiritual subordination of the wife to the husband . . . it nevertheless upholds this subordination in the earthly affairs of marriage. . . .
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> And even if it does come to the point where the borderline situation exists, and the father exercises his right to make the final decision, it is important that the responsible person is one who is constantly aware of the other person in the marriage itself and must accept the consequences of his decision while continuing to live with the other partner.

For each of these authors-C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* (1960) and Helmut Thielicke in *The Ethics of Sex* (1964) respectively-it turns out to be no accident that the New Testament passage which most clearly articulates the call to Christlike faithfulness within marriage should, at the same time, speak of "headship" in marriage. The fundamental assumption-and by far the most important claim-is that husband and wife should be committed to a permanent, lifelong union. They are not to imagine that they could "separate and go their own ways." They must make decisions "while continuing to live with the other partner" and taking account of the need to make such a shared life possible. This is the ground floor on which each of these discussions of headship rests. Both Lewis and Thielicke seem to care about headship chiefly because they discern a connection between it and permanence of the marital bond. Without a commitment to permanence, they would simply accept the fact that under certain circumstances spouses-unable to be reconciled to the "otherness" of the partner-would agree to disagree and go their separate ways. This suggests, in turn, that a culture not committed to permanence in marriage-or committed to it as little more than a fond dream, nice if one can manage it, but not the ground floor on which all else is built-is unlikely to be able to make much sense of headship in marriage.

Even if a commitment to lifelong fidelity were to require headship, however, why should the lot always or ever fall to the husband rather than the wife? She may, after all, be more astute, more judicious, or more responsible. At this point Lewis and Thielicke part company, offering quite different rationales. It may prove instructive to consider each briefly.

Lewis grounds the husband's headship in a certain trait that he considers more characteristically masculine than feminine: namely, the tendency to adopt a relatively more universal, disinterested, and impartial stance toward those with whom one stands in no special bond. That is to say, he thinks that justice will be best served in this way. Lewis' argument is, it seems to me, rather wooden. But when we concentrate on the particular reason he gives, it is thought-provoking to see how analogous it is to certain moves in recent feminist thought. What we should make of this I don't know, but the connections are intriguing to contemplate. Most well known, for example, are the claims of Carol Gilligan about differences in moral development and moral reasoning in males and females (*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, 1982). These are, it is important to see, *differences*-not superiorities or inferiorities. Gilligan is interested in exploring two different modes of moral thought which, as it happens, seem empirically to be somewhat correlated with gender.

Gilligan's studies had as their central point the questioning of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. For Kohlberg the highest stage of moral development involved reasoning that is in accord with principles of universal applicability, principles that leave no room for special preferences or connections-in short, for a justice that abstracts from the particular web of relationships connecting one life to another in special ways. The paradox that triggered Gilligan's concern and study was this: The nature of women has often been associated with traits emphasizing attachment, intimacy, caring, etc. Yet these are the very traits that signify a deficient-because less than impartial-moral development for one who thinks in Kohlberg's terms.

At her best Gilligan discerns two ways of thinking morally, each of them important, neither necessarily superior to the other. These are an "ethic of justice" and an "ethic of care." The former emphasizes rights, equally shared by all, whether near or far. The latter emphasizes a contextual mode of judgment, bound to the particulars of time and place. These are, she says, "two different moralities whose complementarity is the discovery of maturity." Or perhaps, we might add with Lewis in mind, the discovery of a good marriage.

In a somewhat similar vein Carol McMillan suggests that our tendency to think of reason only in terms of universal abstract cognition has ignored or failed to appreciate the more characteristically feminine way of reasoning-one that does not picture affection and emotion as irrational (*Women, Reason, and Nature: Some Philosophical Problems With Feminism*, 1982). We have tended to use a term like "intuitive" to describe such reasoning, suggesting thereby a certain immaturity or undeveloped character. By contrast, McMillan argues that to call knowledge intuitive is only to focus attention on the way in which a particular set of facts strikes a particular person. It does not imply that there has been no process of thought involving sustained effort. It simply emphasizes a kind of learning that happens in a distinctly individual-rather than universal-way. And she argues, in turn, that it is very important that women should think and learn to think in this way.

> It is crucial that, for the most part, women are taught to think at the level of the particular and the affective because the relationship between mother and child is a relationship between two individual human beings. The mother loves her child (or is expected to) simply because it is her child, and equally the child loves its mother (or is expected to) simply because she is its mother. And however primitive or instinctive the relationship between mother and child may seem to us, it never occurs automatically. If the conceptual background and the affective surroundings that make it both possible and intelligible for a woman to take up an attitude of love towards her infant are not present, there will be no such love. . . . Deep maternal love is a possibility for many women in our society only because of the way we think and act in all sorts of other situations.

Whatever their differences, Gilligan and McMillan are alike in this way: They do not respond to male domination by asking-or demanding-that women learn to be like and think like men. Neither do they argue that, since male ways of organizing human life have exacted so great a price, it is good to think like a woman, however undeveloped or irrational such thought may seem. Rather, they affirm two ways of thinking in their respective otherness *and* complementarity. Benjamin Barber, writing in *The New Republic* (July 11, 1983), has described five premises of such thought:

(1) It holds that men and women are biologically differentiated in ways that condition our moral development and social institutions. These cultural distinctions built upon biological differentiation are not wholly inevitable, but neither can they be eradicated.

(2) These differences are, in fact, "life-enriching" and should be cultivated.

(3) Androgyny is undesirable in its "homogeneous uniformity."

(4) Women's special connection to "generativity, nurturing, and affection" gives them "a unique appreciation of (and responsibility for) the ethics of caring and of affiliation indispensable to the preservation of a civilization."

(5) The quest for justice should not be a search for symmetry. "Instead, ways must be found to preserve (or create) political and economic equality in the face of differing social roles, distinctive gender needs, and contrasting, if (ideally) complementary approaches to moral development and reasoning."

It is, of course, improbable that either Gilligan or McMillan would be greatly attracted to the language of headship within marriage. Nor do I know that either would think of commitment to lifelong fidelity as basic to the marital bond and related to headship in the way it is for Lewis and Thielicke. Nonetheless, it is striking to see the congruence of their arguments with what I have termed Lewis' rather wooden suggestion. They put some flesh on the bones of that suggestion, making it seem less like an example of misogyny and more like an insight.

All this should not blind us to the dangers in Lewis' approach. I recall the frustration I experienced the first time I read Karl Barth's discussion of marriage (and headship) in Volume III/4 of his *Church Dogmatics*. Many have been frustrated by that discussion, of course, but for most the frustration arises simply from Barth's insistence that there must be headship-an "order" of "preceding and following" in the relation of husband and wife. For me, however, the frustration was that Barth should insist on the necessity of such order but refuse to say anything concretely about what the order should be like. To be sure, the husband precedes; the wife follows. He imitates the attitude of Christ; she the attitude of the community. But Barth will at once add, "In carrying out this imitation, which of the two cannot be described as both preceding and following?" There must be this order; yet it seems Barth can say almost nothing about its form or shape.

It is, of course, hardly likely that Barth was too timid to set himself against the current of opinion growing already in his day. The hesitation is, I think, grounded elsewhere: in Barth's rejection of "every phenomenology or typology of the sexes," even those he personally found rather persuasive. Such rejection is, in his view, required if we are to remain open to the divine command. Any typology of gender roles within marriage would seem to enable us to specify in advance appropriate activity for husband or wife-thereby undercutting the freedom of the Divine Commander.

I am inclined to put the matter somewhat differently. Any such typology will be grounded in our embodied nature, and we have already granted the importance for Christian thought of taking seriously that embodiment. But the human being is not only finite body. We are also free spirit-with a freedom that is constantly transcending old limits and adding new and unforeseen contours to human life. We are nature-but also history. Christian thought must always struggle to hold the two together, lest it should fail to affirm the wholeness of our created being. This means, when thinking about sexuality, that we should trust that the meaning of our life as masculine or feminine cannot be severed from our creation as biological male or female. But it also means that our respect for human freedom should make us hesitant to affirm too quickly-whether with Lewis, Gilligan, or McMillan-many limits on the historical permutations that gender distinctions may take. To that degree one might say with Barth that "we can here only ask questions to which ethics can give no answer in advance."

This suggests that we ought to consider the other attempt-by Thielicke-to make sense of the headship requirement. He affirms the headship of the husband but, unlike Lewis, without making any claims about its appropriateness based on traits ascribed to men and women, claims which our historical freedom might one day make obsolete. Yet he does not entirely sever nature and history, as if freedom without limit were the sole truth about human beings. He is willing to consider that there might be a limit which we can in our freedom surpass but, in order to remain faithful to our created nature, ought not.

For Thielicke even more than Lewis it is clear that the importance of headship lies only in its relation to lifelong fidelity in marriage. He reserves the exercise of such headship for those borderline cases when it is needed for the marriage to survive. In such moments agreement is needed, and headship provides the means to it. But we may still want to ask again, why should the headship be the husband's? Not for Thielicke at this point any claims about masculine and feminine ways of being or reasoning. Maybe they are well grounded; maybe not. They need not, as we have seen, imply any inequality between husband and wife; yet we quite easily turn them into superior and inferior ways of being, into capacities that make the husband somehow more deserving of headship. For Thielicke, by contrast, it is very clearly not a matter of capacity or qualification. It is, rather, "the tradition of Christendom based upon the Holy Scriptures." That is all there is to be said for the husband's headship-though, of course, for Christian conscience it is a great deal indeed.

It is worth our seeing one great strength of this view. The husband's headship is not grounded in any superior or distinguishing traits or capacities; rather, it is simply the exquisitely arbitrary burden of office. Precisely in this arbitrariness it sets us free from false typologies of masculine and feminine. Men are not more qualified to exercise headship. It is just that-needing consensus in faithful marriage, but finding no guarantee of it-God tapped man and said, "You do it." It is rather like a point Chesterton once made not about marriage but about kingship.

> Next to a genuine republic, the most democratic thing in the world is a hereditary despotism. I mean a despotism in which there is absolutely no trace whatever of any nonsense about intellect or special fitness for the post. Rational despotism-that is, selective despotism-is always a curse to mankind, because with that you have the ordinary man misunderstood and misgoverned by some prig who has no brotherly respect for him at all. But irrational despotism is always democratic, because it is the ordinary man enthroned. . . .
>
> Hereditary despotism is, then, in essence and sentiment democratic because it chooses from mankind at random. If it does not declare that every man may rule, it declares the next most democratic thing; it declares that any man may rule.

To see Thielicke's view in this way is to see that he too-despite the simple appeal to authority-is attempting to make sense of headship. But his view is also not without costs. Precisely by grounding his explanation of headship in simple appeal to authority, he loses much of the richness in relationship, the complementarity in interdependence, that one can read into the view of Lewis. Risking less in his discussion of headship, he may also gain less.

In any case, in these two illustrations we can see both the promise and the problem of attempts to take seriously headship within marriage. By now it should at least be clear what is at stake in the concept. It offers a way of trying to live the differences that mark our fellow-humanity within the communion of marriage-to permit those differences to enrich and help preserve the bond without reducing it to a contrapuntal union of interchangeable persons. Not to see this is to miss the point of the concept. Articulating a vision of headship (whether in Lewis' or Thielicke's manner) is a way of saying that the marriage bond is not simply a means to individual self-realization. It is a way of saying that the liberal individualism which has served-and, in my judgment, continues to serve-us well in the political sphere is not as appropriate within the bond of marriage. Even "equality" is a quantitative term, and therefore the love that nourishes marriage may better be characterized in terms of mutuality-the giving and receiving, in countless different ways appropriate to the differentiation that marks our humanity, of mutual submission to each other out of reverence for Christ.

In a sinful world, a world in which women flee for shelter to escape another battering by their husbands, we do well to keep clearly in mind that husband and wife submit to each other, as Ephesians puts it, "out of reverence for Christ." Barth quite rightly emphasizes that, in seeking to find and fill their different roles within the marriage, husband and wife submit not so much to each other as to the order itself-that is, to Christ. Submission is out of place where there is no serious attempt on the part of husband and wife to nourish a mutual spirit of giving and receiving within their communion.

This means, perhaps paradoxically, that those most willing to accept the order of Ephesians 5 are least likely to have to appeal to it. For in a good marriage the focus and emphasis will not be on headship but on faithfulness. Those spouses who are antecedently committed to a permanent bond will take as part of their task fostering the differentiation that marks our fellow-humanity. Perhaps for some the understanding of that task which seems to be presupposed in Ephesians may lack appeal. For them the contrapuntal vision of Sayers can be recommended as an alternative vision-to see whether a union of interchangeable persons really is the meaning of marriage. Perhaps over time they and we will learn from their attempt. But perhaps it will turn out that Sayers' vision does not capture the full richness and meaning of the harmony of marriage, does not sufficiently heal the wound of our individuality within a faithful bond of those who are different-and is not, therefore, adequate to sustain the call to permanence in marriage.

In any case, for Christian spouses who understand marriage as a sphere in which we begin to be trained in the meaning and discipline of fidelity, marriage will be understood as a task. Committing themselves to lifelong union, they must learn in the countless ways appropriate to different marriages the meaning of our fellow-humanity, the hard work of being faithful in the whole of life to one who is not just an-other person but who-within this marriage-remains "other." C. S. Lewis came to marriage late in life, long after writing the passage I have cited above. But he was able to say, after the death of his wife, what commitment to that bond made possible. He wrote in *A Grief Observed* (1966):

> We did learn and achieve something. There is, hidden or flaunted, a sword between the sexes till an entire marriage reconciles them. It is arrogance in [men] to call frankness, fairness, and chivalry "masculine" when we see them in a woman; it is arrogance in [women] to describe a man's sensitiveness or tact or tenderness as "feminine." But also what poor, warped fragments of humanity most mere men and mere women must be to make the implications of that arrogance plausible. Marriage heals this. Jointly the two become fully human. "In the image of God created he them." Thus, by a paradox, this carnival of sexuality leads us out beyond our sexes.

To begin this work of correction and transformation is a task at the very heart of the marriage bond.

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