

Not Just Good,
but *Beautiful*

The Complementary Relationship
between Man and Woman



POPE FRANCIS


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Preface

From November 17 through 19, 2014, Rome bore witness to an extraordinary gathering of four hundred scholars and religious leaders from around the world, convening in an international colloquium to discuss the complementarity of man and woman in marriage. Opened by Pope Francis, sponsored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and co-hosted by the Pontifical Council for the Family, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, the *Humanum* colloquium brought religious leaders into direct discussion with scholars, researchers, family counselors, social workers, and community organizers – all for the single purpose of reflecting together on the fundamental good of the complementary union of man and woman.

The mere existence of such a broad-based gathering, and the obvious goodwill among the participants, is already an affirmation that the joyful truth of the complementarity of man and woman in marriage is not a sectarian proposition or a belief limited to one or another

religious group. Rather, the great religious traditions of the world together recognize that the truth of marriage is something written on the human heart by a loving Creator. Thus this initiative is born of the conviction that the union of husband and wife in marriage offers a vital contribution to the flourishing of spouses, children, communities, and whole societies.

The gathering was called *Humanum: An International Colloquium on the Complementarity of Man and Woman*. “*Humanum*” signifies man and woman together—humanity in the image of a loving God, the creator of all life and the origin of human society. As a term, “complementarity” is sometimes misused and misconstrued to imply the subjugation of one sex to the other. At its core, however, it encompasses the equality of women and men while neither obscuring nor diminishing their differences.

Complementarity entails a reciprocity wherein men and women depend upon each other and learn from each other; it benefits spouses directly while also being open, receptive, and life-giving. Perhaps at this historical moment, when so many other models of relationships are proposed and promoted without sufficient reflection, the common testimony of believers from various traditions on the creative power of man and woman together can be a source of hope and inspiration to people of goodwill everywhere.

The international, ecumenical, and interreligious character of *Humanum* is particularly helpful in removing the discussion of marriage from the realm of politics and setting it on a firmer and more enlightening foundation. In the colloquium presentations gathered in this

volume, the authors draw upon their religious conviction, yes, but also upon philosophy, sociology, psychology, and the biological sciences in order to consider the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person and the intrinsic meaning of marriage. There is also substantial consideration of the needs of the poor, of young people, and of the challenges posed when more privileged nations attempt to impose ideological and political notions about the family onto other nations.

Indeed, the breadth of so many different perspectives on complementarity, taken together, offers eloquent witness to the interrelatedness of man and woman, male and female. At the same time, the different authors highlight varying aspects of the ways the sexes relate in a complementary manner. Some emphasize how each sex takes on some of the other's gifts and then expresses them in a way particular to the sex of the recipient. Others highlight the unique way that one sex can draw out the best from the other, and supply the needs of the other in a marvellous synergy that certainly regards procreation and the raising of children, but also permeates every other interaction and activity of the spouses. Following upon these reflections, the colloquium participants affirm that political attempts to redefine the essence of marriage, while neglecting this source of nuptial dynamism, ignore something that is fundamental to the nature of human relationships. Such attempts cannot succeed.

Humanum does not overlook the concrete, pastoral implications of this conversation about marriage. Discussions within the Catholic Church during the recent Synod of Bishops have underscored the importance of new language to describe the nature and genius of marriage

and family life, language that might propose the beauty of marriage to a world grown tired of a conversation that focuses only on problems in relationships, divorce, declining marriage rates, and the like. Relatively little energy has been devoted to a robust discussion about the creative power of the complementary union, or dynamic strategies to support marriage and families. The fourteen religious traditions represented by the Humanum speakers offer proposals drawn from the wisdom of those cultures and traditions about marriage and the intrinsic value of parenting and community formation. The texts collected in this volume offer a rich treasure of new language and insights into the family at its starting point: the husband and wife. They are intelligent and moving, beautiful and rational at one and the same time.

This collection of presentations is offered as a contribution to a discussion that must continue. By considering carefully what marriage involves at its core – the complementary relationship of man and woman – we contribute to the development of what Pope Francis calls a new human ecology, one which affirms equality in dignity and respects the diversity of women and men. The colloquium was indeed a unique occasion for discussion, cooperation, and common witness on a matter of fundamental human importance. But one such gathering can never be the final word. With this volume, I invite your participation in continuing the conversation of Humanum so that this new human ecology may flourish.

Gerhard Cardinal Müller
Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
The Vatican, March 30, 2015



*“To reflect upon complementarity is nothing less than
to ponder the dynamic harmonies at the heart of all
Creation. . . . It is not just a good thing,
but it is also beautiful.”*

P O P E F R A N C I S

I

POPE FRANCIS

Not Just Good, but Beautiful

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN by sharing with you a reflection on the title of your colloquium. “Complementarity” is a precious word, with multiple meanings. It can refer to situations where one of two things adds to, completes, or fulfills a lack in the other. But complementarity is much more than that. Christians find its deepest meaning in the First Letter to the Corinthians, where Saint Paul tells us that the Spirit has endowed each of us with different gifts so that – just as the human body’s members work together for the good of the whole – everyone’s gifts can work together for the benefit of each (1 Cor. 12). To reflect upon “complementarity” is nothing less than to ponder the dynamic harmonies at the heart of all creation. This is the key word, harmony. All complementarities were made by our Creator, because the Holy Spirit, who is the Author of harmony, achieves this harmony.

It is fitting that you have gathered here in this international colloquium to explore the complementarity of man and woman. This complementarity is at the root of marriage and family, which is the first school where we learn to appreciate our own and others' gifts, and where we begin to acquire the arts of living together. For most of us, the family provides the principal place where we can begin to "breathe" values and ideals, as well to realize our full capacity for virtue and charity. At the same time, as we know, families are places of tensions: between egoism and altruism, reason and passion, immediate desires and long-range goals. But families also provide frameworks for resolving such tensions. This is important. When we speak of complementarity between man and woman in this context, let us not confuse that term with the simplistic idea that all the roles and relations of the two sexes are fixed in a single, static pattern. Complementarity will take many forms as each man and woman brings his or her distinctive contributions to their marriage and to the formation of their children – his or her personal richness, personal charisma. Complementarity becomes a great wealth. It is not just a good thing but it is also beautiful.

In our day, marriage and the family are in crisis. We now live in a culture of the temporary, in which more and

◆ POPE FRANCIS *is the leader of the Catholic Church. Before he was elected to the papacy on March 13, 2013, he was Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina. He is the first Jesuit pope, the first from the Americas, and the first to take the name Francis, inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi, whom he has called "the man of the poor, the man of peace, the man who loved and cared for creation."*

more people are simply giving up on marriage as a public commitment. This revolution in manners and morals has often flown the flag of freedom, but in fact it has brought spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Evidence is mounting that the decline of the marriage culture is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills, disproportionately affecting women, children, and the elderly. It is always they who suffer the most in this crisis.

The crisis in the family has produced a crisis of human ecology, for social environments, like natural environments, need protection. And although the human race has come to understand the need to address conditions that menace our natural environments, we have been slower to recognize that our fragile social environments are under threat as well, slower in our culture, and also in our Catholic Church. It is therefore essential that we foster a new human ecology and advance it.

It is necessary first to promote the fundamental pillars that govern a nation: its nonmaterial goods. The family is the foundation of coexistence and a guarantee against social fragmentation. Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's development and emotional maturity. That is why I stressed in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* that the contribution of marriage to society is "indispensable"; that it "transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple" (n. 66). And that is why I am grateful to you for your Colloquium's emphasis on the benefits that marriage can provide to children, the spouses themselves, and to society.

In these days, as you embark on a reflection on the beauty of complementarity between man and woman in marriage, I urge you to lift up yet another truth about marriage: that permanent commitment to solidarity, fidelity, and fruitful love responds to the deepest longings of the human heart. Let us bear in mind especially the young people, who represent our future. It is important that they do not give themselves over to the poisonous mentality of the temporary, but rather be revolutionaries with the courage to seek true and lasting love, going against the common pattern.

With regard to this I want to say one thing: Let us not fall into the trap of being qualified by ideological concepts. Family is an anthropological fact—a socially and culturally related fact. We cannot qualify it with concepts of an ideological nature that are relevant only in a single moment of history and then pass by. We can't speak today of a conservative notion of family or a progressive notion of family. Family is family! It can't be qualified by ideological notions. Family has a strength in and of itself.

May this colloquium be an inspiration to all who seek to support and strengthen the union of man and woman in marriage as a unique, natural, fundamental, and beautiful good for persons, families, communities, and whole societies.



“This fact, indelible in human nature, reveals our radical dependence: we do not complete ourselves from our own selves, we are not totally self-sufficient.”

GERHARD MÜLLER

An Opening to the Mystery of God

WE ARE GATHERED TO CONSIDER more deeply the theme of the complementarity between man and woman. Each of us, reflecting on his or her human condition, perceives how one's own humanity cannot be exhausted in oneself. One's own male or female being is not sufficient to oneself. Each one of us feels needy and lacking in completion. This fact, indelible in human nature, reveals our radical dependence: we do not complete ourselves from our own selves, we are not totally self-sufficient.

This simple consideration, clear to all, would suffice to demonstrate the inadequacy of the markedly individualistic trait so characteristic of the modern mentality. Yet in the roots of our "I," there is inscribed a natural tension, opposed to such a mentality, which is unfortunately now diffused in many parts of the world.

Our meeting takes as its point of departure this elementary consideration, opening it to the mystery of

God. It gives rise to the question: what import does the complementarity between man and woman have for the relationship between the human person and God? It is this question that each of our cultural and religious traditions is invited to engage.

From the Bible, an opening of perspective

In the Judeo-Christian perspective this theme is quite relevant and emerges immediately in the reading and interpretation found in tradition on the basis of some basic and essential biblical texts.

I begin with a passage from the Book of Proverbs, a collection of wisdom sayings of Israel: “Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden” (Prov. 30:18–19).

Here, proposed for our consideration, is a mystery of wisdom, which is relevant to the desire of all religions: to understand how God manifests himself in the world. The text offers three enigmas: the way of the eagle in the sky, the snake on the rock, the ship on the waters. To these three is added a fourth, according to a paradigm which,

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in wisdom literature, represents the synthesis and fullness of the other three: “the way of a man with a maiden.” It is well known that wisdom literature speaks of God, not directly, but from the point of view of his presence in, and action on, the created.

The first three enigmas gather all spheres of the cosmos: air, earth, water – in their movement from God and toward God. In this way, they bring to mind the first chapter of Genesis, which recounts the creation of all the elements of the cosmos and of all beings, following the temporal rhythm of the week toward the Sabbath rest in God. This account culminates in the creation of man and woman, inviting us in this way to consider the fourth enigma, “the way of a man with a maiden,” as the fullness of all ways in which the Creator makes himself present in the created and propels it toward himself. In this sense, if the first account of creation finishes precisely on the Sabbath as the day of the covenant (Gen. 2:2–3), the second account finds its fulfilment in the appearance of man and woman, symbol of the great covenant between God and Israel (Gen. 2:22–24).

What then – in the light of this – is the meaning of the expression “the way of a man with a maiden”? According to some, it may refer to the path by which a man joins himself to a woman, to the conjugal union: the entire cosmos participates in the unity of one flesh between husband and wife, assumed in the body of the spouses, and opens itself in love toward the presence and action of God. The expression may also signify the path by which man and woman come out of themselves, that is to say birth as the marvelous locus for the presence of the Creator, who blesses his creature.

Hence, we may conclude that the difference between man and woman, both in the union of love and the generation of life, concerns God's presence in the world, which every person is called to discover in order to find a solid and lasting foundation and destiny for life.

The difference between man and woman as an essential element to understanding the human being and our journey toward God

These thoughts may assist us in the question which will be at the heart of our reflections during this gathering: in what way does God make himself present in the complementarity between man and woman? The response will be useful not only to draw closer to the divine mystery, but will also open us to a deeper understanding of the human person.

The presence of God appears in the first place in the way in which God models the body of man and woman. The Bible speaks of God as the artisan who shapes every person in the mother's womb (Jer. 1:5; Ps. 139:13). Faith in the Creator is linked to this initial experience: in the body, there exists a primordial language, a gift that enables us to receive and communicate love. The human body, in its sexual difference, is not a chance product of blind evolution or an anonymous determination of elements.

What is it that speaks to us of this difference contained in body language? This has attracted the attention of all cultures. For example, the myth of Androgyny, which Plato speaks about in his Symposium, is well known. By divine punishment, original man – a spherical being, and, at the same time, male and female, was divided in two in a way that each part remains in constant search of

