

Put Pain like That Beyond My Power

*A Christocentric Theodicy with Respect
to the Inequality of Male and Female Power*

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THE LATIN POET OVID TELLS the poignant and tragic tale of Caenis, a young maiden who was once a “famous beauty, the loveliest of all the girls of Thessaly.”¹ As is so often the case in classical myth, Caenis is pursued and ravished by a god—in this case the god Neptune. Neptune, while not quite contrite, nonetheless offers to grant Caenis a wish as a form of compensation for his deed. Caenis responds,

This wrong you’ve done me needs an enormous wish—
Put pain like that beyond my power. Grant me
To cease to be a woman. Everything
That gift will be to me.²

And so Neptune grants Caenis her wish. Caenis, now Caenus, “rejoicing in this gift,” passed his days as a mighty warrior and a man.³

Ovid’s *Caenis*, though a tale of divine and human interaction, captures well the tumultuous relationship that exists between men and women. This

¹The tale can be found in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), XII.188, p. 279.

²Ibid., XII.100-104, p. 280.

³Ibid., XII.109, p. 280.

relationship, while often full of beauty, has nonetheless been fraught with suffering and abuse. Women throughout human history have too often been oppressed by an abusive use of male power. This abuse takes many forms—from subtle marginalization and exclusion to physical violence. We in the West live in a culture that, at least on the surface, champions the dignity and value of women, but we have not been able to wholly shake our Neptunian tendencies. Whatever our cultural ideals, women suffer at the hands of men far more than the reverse—as any police officer responding to a domestic call can attest. This disproportional suffering of women is the historically verifiable and motivating reality that has justifiably driven the variegated feminist movements throughout history (not least the feminist movements of our day). Even a casual survey—Aristotle’s claim that women are misbegotten males, to present-day Saudi Arabia’s social and religious ban on women driving, to China’s only recently abolished “one child” law that invariably preferenced boys over girls—shows that women have all too often occupied a second-class position with respect to men in ways that men have not typically had to occupy with respect to women.⁴ The violence (whether physical or psychological or social) that has marked the war between the sexes has been asymmetrical.

The central premise of this chapter is that it is the man’s greater power vis-à-vis the woman that accounts for much of this abuse. Here it is necessary to clarify what I mean by *power*. I do not have in mind *power* as an immaterial construct, but more narrowly *power* as a capacity for “raw physical force.” There are many forms of power beyond physical strength. Sexual power, intellectual power, social power, political power, relational power—all are forms of power that compete and often triumph over raw physical power. My claim here is not that women lack power, or that women are inherently less powerful than men. My claim is more simply that men have a greater capacity for physical force than women, and that this greater capacity for force is a primary occasion for male tyranny over women. Rape is the most vivid and tragic expression of this greater male capacity for force. But this same rapine impulse is manifested in a thousand lesser ways every time men use their greater physical power to marginalize and subject women.

⁴Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 2.3.737a.

The greater levels of male physical power and its frequent misuse against women raises a serious question of theodicy: Why would God create humanity in such a way that there exists an inherent inequality of physical power between men and women, if this inequality has indeed resulted in such pervasive abuse and marginalization of women at the hands of men? The pagan god Neptune protected Caenis from further abuse by granting her desire to become a man and a great warrior. Neptune eliminated the potential for abuse by eliminating her femininity, by erasing the physical power gap between Caenis and the male world around her. Never again would a man force his will upon her, because she would have her own supply of god-given force to counteract the unwanted force of men. Neptune's initial assault notwithstanding, is the God of the Bible less wise and compassionate than Neptune for failing to endow women with a capacity for force proportional to men? And most pressing, how should we navigate this power inequality? Are we to resist it as an evil, like Caenis—a thing to be feared and overcome? Or should we embrace it as a creational good? Or is there perhaps a *via media* between these two responses?

This paper seeks to provide (the beginnings of) a Christocentric theodicy that accounts for the divine wisdom in the physical power inequality between men and women and suggests a way forward for male/female relationships. Ultimately, I will argue that the physical power disparity between men and women has been purposefully ordained by God as a typological pointer to the gospel. Though often distorted by sin, power is not something to be shunned, but something to be deployed and shared in the service of sacrificial and empowering love. Toward this end, I will draw upon three main resources: the “third-wave” feminist Camille Paglia, the late Pope John Paul II, and St. Paul. We begin with Paglia.

CAMILLE PAGLIA: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIOLOGY AND TYRANNY

In the preceding introduction I make the claim that the man's greater physical power vis-à-vis the woman has been a primary occasion for the oppression and abuse of women. It is intuitively obvious that such a claim is true with respect to physical violence. But my claim goes further. I am suggesting that it is the man's greater physical strength that has historically

been a primary occasion for all types of abuse and marginalization of women—cultural, social, and political.

This is by no mean an uncontested claim. Many feminists (and others) argue instead that the main occasion for the historic male marginalization of women has little or nothing to do with biology and instead is sourced in the inequitable distribution of power within the political, social, and vocational structures of a given culture.⁵ Just as certain races at certain points of history have been denied access to political, social, or cultural power, so too women have been denied the same. The solution then for gender equality from this perspective runs along the same lines as the solution for racial equality—a redistribution of political, social, and cultural power.

But third-wave feminist Camille Paglia disagrees. Paglia's breakthrough work is *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*.⁶ Paglia's writing is witty, aphoristic, and not without controversy among her fellow feminists. Paglia is one of the voices within third-wave feminism calling for feminists to recognize the innate biological differences between men and women and to reckon with how these differences relate to the feminist project: "Feminists grossly oversimplify the problem of sex when they reduce it to a matter of social convention: readjust society, eliminate sexual inequality, purify sex roles, and happiness and harmony will reign."⁷

For Paglia, the assertion of her fellow feminists that the problem is merely cultural, political, or social only begs the question of who it is that created such cultural constructs in the first place. Paglia's controversial answer is that human culture writ large is primarily the creation of men.⁸ This claim

⁵Feminism is a variegated movement that cannot be easily defined, from the late nineteenth-century feminism in the West, with its focus on political equality for men and women, seen most clearly in the suffrage movement, to "second-wave" feminism with its emphasis on social and cultural equality, to what has now emerged since the 1990s as "third-wave feminism," which is in many respects a response to what has been seen by some feminists as the overreach of second-wave feminism. Though variegated, we can nonetheless speak of "feminism" if we limit our definition to something like the following: "Feminism is that movement, led by women, which has sought as its goal political, social, and cultural equality between men and women."

⁶Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

⁷*Ibid.*, 1.

⁸For more from Paglia on this, see her *Time* essay, "It's a Man's World, and It Always Will Be," *Time*, December 16, 2013, www.ideas.time.com/2013/12/16/its-a-mans-world-and-it-always-will-be/. For a similar argument, see also Roy F. Baumeister, *Is There Anything Good About Men? How Cultures Flourish by Exploiting Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

seems intuitively correct, just on a plain reading of human history, given that historically the distribution of cultural power has consistently favored men over women. Clearly we would expect a different distribution of political and social power between men and women if women had had an equal or greater share in creating the cultural power structures. Analogously, the cultural constructs in the United States have favored whites over blacks; such cultural, social, and political racial inequality is undoubtedly because the cultural constructs in the United States have largely been the product of whites. Following Paglia's logic, if a cultural construct favors one party over another, that's a sure sign it was created by the party the culture favors.

But we must press this further and ask the question of why it is that men have historically, with near universality, been able to act as the primary shapers of the cultural constructs that have advantaged men over women. Paglia's most basic answer is biology. "Feminists, seeking to drive power relations out of sex have set themselves against nature. . . . In nature, brute force is the law, a survival of the fittest."⁹ Paglia, in a critique of her fellow feminists, argues that too much of the feminist movement has failed to grapple with this fixed fact of nature. Paglia is not endorsing the oppression of women, of course. Rather she is calling her fellow feminists to acknowledge that while women can and should seek political and social equality, they cannot get free from "contingency, that is, human limitation by nature or fate."¹⁰ Paglia acknowledges that women have their own ways of oppressing and tyrannizing men. But she realistically acknowledges that men have a greater capacity for "brute force" vis-à-vis women, and that this greater capacity for force enables men to dominate and oppress women in ways that are not proportional or possible in the reverse. As Paglia poignantly states, when it comes to biology, "nature's burden falls more heavily on one sex."¹¹

The appeals to racial oppression as analogous to gender oppression serve to confirm, rather than undermine, Paglia's claim. The oppression of the races throughout human history has been fluid—waxing and waning with the passing of time. No one race has unswervingly retained the upper hand

⁹Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 2-3.

¹⁰Ibid., 3.

¹¹Ibid., 9.

over another. The Philistines created cultural constructs that marginalized the Jews during the days of the judges, and then the Jews did the same to the Philistines under the Davidic dynasty. Latin Romans during the age of empire created power structures that marginalized indigenous Britons, Northern Europeans, and North Africans. When the Roman Empire crumbled, the barbarians on the Roman frontiers returned the favor. Examples of such cultural power shifts could be given *ad infinitum*.

But the cultural, political, and social oppression/marginalization of women at the hands of men has not been limited to particular times and places, such as we find with race. From the dawn of recorded human history the cultural constructs have—with almost no meaningful exceptions—advantaged men.¹² This is because culture is created by those who occupy the power position. Or again, culture is created by those who have the greatest capacity for force. This is certainly true with respect to race and cultural power. The Philistines oppressed Israel because they could, and Israel oppressed the Philistines because they could. And so on throughout human history. In a world that is (as Tennyson puts it) “red in tooth and claw,” the physical capacity to force one’s will on another—whether of entire nations, or individuals, or between gods and maidens—is nearly always the deciding factor in the success of tyranny. All other forms of power, when confronted in a do-or-die battle against raw physical power, must in the end, give way. The unarmed gladiator may have greater intellectual power than the lion, but on the sands of the coliseum, the lion is the winner every time.

Women are endowed with a great deal of power—intellectual, sexual, relational, emotional, etc.—in capacities that are equal to or supersede men. But physical power is the one type of power where men—as a gender—exceed women. And physical power is the one type of power that is indispensable for establishing the social, political, and vocational power structures of a culture.

Those who reject Paglia’s claim about the priority of biology as a primary occasion for male tyranny over women must offer an alternate account of why men have historically tyrannized over women in ways that women have

¹²This assertion can be made notwithstanding the (highly) speculative feminists accounts of a human prehistory marked by a dominant matriarchal culture. Actual matriarchal societies have existed but constitute a tiny percentage of the overall anthropological data.

not tyrannized over men. Appeals to culture only push the problem down the street, since we must then ask why it is that men have been universally successful (with almost no meaningful exceptions) in creating cultures that have privileged men over women. Clearly there is something hardwired into the system that perpetuates the inequalities.¹³ The history of our species teaches us that human beings seek their own advantage at the expense of others, and that apart from some outside influence, will continue to do so to the degree that they have capacity. This is, of course, a distinctly pessimistic way of conceiving of human nature. But it is also a deeply Christian way. In a fallen world cut off from divine grace, justice is, as Plato once cynically remarked, merely the advantage of the stronger.¹⁴

And it is here that we must confront the theodicy questions. Why would God create an asymmetrical power structure between men and women, given that this asymmetry is fertile soil for the marginalization of women? For the beginnings of an answer we now turn to John Paul II's account of the human body.

JOHN PAUL II: A THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

John Paul II's *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (hereafter *TOB*) is a wide-ranging series of addresses on the meaning of gender, sex, sexuality, sexual desire, and the body.¹⁵ Basic to John Paul II's

¹³Were more space available, it would be worth pressing the point that it is not only the male's greater capacity for force, but his greater willingness to use it, that accounts for the male acquisition and keeping of cultural power. This psychological disposition too finds its roots in biology. See Dorian Furtuna, "Male Aggression: Why Are Males More Violent?," *Psychology Today Blog*, September 14, 2014, www.psychologytoday.com/blog/homo-aggressivus/201409/male-aggression; and Baumeister, *Is There Anything Good About Men?*, 47-59. Whether or not one grants my premise that men's greater capacity for physical force is a primary explanation for the larger cultural subjection of women writ large, the point still stands that men's greater physical capacity for force is very often the occasion for male physical violence against women in ways that are not symmetrical to female violence against men. The theodicy question remains.

¹⁴Said by Thrasymachus in Plato, *Republica* 338c.

¹⁵Most of my references to John Paul II are from John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), hereafter cited as *TOB*. John Paul II has not been without his critics. See for example Patrick Snyder, *La femme selon Jean-Paul II. Lecture des fondements anthropologiques et théologiques et des applications pratiques de son enseignement* (Québec: Fides, 1999). The space limits of this essay allow for only a brief presentation of John Paul II's work, not a defense. For a defense of John Paul II against feminist critics, see Michele M. Schumacher, "John Paul II's Theology of the Body on Trial: Responding to the Accusation of the Biological Reduction of Women," *Nova et Vetera* (English ed.) 10, no. 2 (2012): 463-84.

work is his insistence that the human body contains a theology—that is, that our bodies tell us something about who we are as human beings and signify to us our purpose in the world.¹⁶ In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II captures the essence of his project when he states, “There is a truth of creation which must be acknowledged.”¹⁷ For John Paul II, biology is theology. Pushing back against modern and Cartesian notions of a depersonalized body, John Paul II rightly contends that our bodies are not merely arbitrary outer shells. The way we are shaped, the way the male and female bodies fit together, and the way in which conjugal love reproduces life—all inform our understanding of what it means to be human. Most fundamentally for John Paul II, the body “expresses the person.”¹⁸ Indeed, John Paul II’s language blurs the lines between the person and the body when he writes, “Man does not *have* a body, he *is* a body.”¹⁹ Rather than merely finding the *imago Dei* in the intellect, as has been customary in much of Christian theology (e.g., Augustine and Aquinas), John Paul II insists that our bodies also reflect the *imago Dei*.²⁰ Man, as the visible *eikon* of the Creator, communicates through his body a true statement about God and his own humanity.

In *TOB*, John Paul II deploys this logic most specifically in service of expounding the beauty and meaning of marital love. But for the purposes of this essay, I wish to focus on John Paul II’s fundamental insight that the human body communicates a theology (and anthropology) and use this insight to frame our understanding of gender and power. As has been observed, from the very beginning, creation invariably places the man in a position of physical power vis-à-vis the woman. While there are, of course, exceptions to the rule, social psychologist Dorian Furtuna notes that the average man has 75 percent more arm strength than the average woman, and that the upper male body is 90 percent stronger than the upper female body. He goes on to add, “Men are taller, they have denser and heavier bones, their

¹⁶This is an essentially Thomistic understanding of the body (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 91, a. 3), as Matthew Levering points out in his chapter on Thomas Aquinas’s sexual ethics.

¹⁷John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, English ed. (New York: Random House), 22.

¹⁸John Paul II, *TOB*, 14.5.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 12.15.

²⁰The seeds for this type of theological anthropology can be found as early as Irenaeus, who insists that the body constitutes the image of God, prophetically and typologically reflecting the incarnate Son (*Adversus haereses* 5.16.2). Thus for Irenaeus, the image of God points to the embodied Son, rather than the nonembodied Father.

jaw is more massive, their reaction time is shorter, their visual acuity is better, their muscle/fat ratio is greater, their heart is bulkier, their percentage of hemoglobin is higher, their skin is thicker, their lungs bigger, and their resistance to dehydration is higher.”²¹ All of these physical differences give the man an advantage over the woman with respect to force. Adding to the physical disparity between men and women is the additional reality that the survival of our species depends on women carrying human life inside of them for the better part of a year. Physical mobility during pregnancy, recovery after pregnancy, and the unique dietary needs of an infant (handled exclusively via breastfeeding until only recently in human history) all increase the woman’s vulnerability to male power.

From a Cartesian perspective the man’s greater physical power can have no significance since the body has no essential meaning. Men are stronger than women, and women have babies. It all means nothing and says nothing about what it means to be a man or a woman. But following John Paul II’s insight that biology is theology, one is compelled to ask what meaning the disparity of physical power between men and women has for our understanding of what it means to be a man and a woman. Unless one were to posit some sort of genetic diminishment of the woman as a consequence of the fall (a rather strange idea), we are left to grapple with the fact that God, for some reason, purposefully created men to be physically stronger than women. I do not recall anywhere in *TOB* where John Paul II notes the physical power disparity between men and women or draws any significance from it. But if we follow John Paul II’s line of thought, surely it means *something*. What exactly it means is not revealed in the creation account.²²

²¹Dorian Furtuna, “Male Aggression.” Furtuna lists the following studies for his data: T. Abe, C. F. Kearns, and T. Fukunaga, “Sex Differences in Whole Body Skeletal Muscle Mass Measured by Magnetic Resonance Imaging and Its Distribution in Young Japanese Adults,” *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 37 (2003): 436-40; and R. W. Bohannon, “Reference Values for Extremity Muscle Strength Obtained by Hand-Held Dynamometry from Adults Aged 20 to 79 years,” *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* 78 (1997): 26-32. For more on the biological difference and how these differences affect social dynamics, see Anne and Bill Moir, *Why Men Don’t Iron: The Fascinating and Unalterable Differences Between Men and Women* (New York: Citadel Press, 1999). For theological reflection on these differences (in keeping with the spirit of my essay), see Owen Strachan, “On Power and Fragility: Reflections on John Paul II’s Theology of Bodily Womanhood,” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 1.1 (June 2014): 61-72.

²²Observe here that I am not making a natural law argument about how men and women should relate to each other. My deployment of John Paul II is not an effort to say *what* the physical disparity between men and women means, but rather more modestly to say that it means

But John Paul II points us in the right direction in *TOB*, cat. 86-102, where he exegetes Ephesians 5:21-23, drawing out the typological meaning of marriage. In this section, John Paul II argues, following Paul, that marriage is most fundamentally about Christ and the church. For John Paul II, Paul's treatment of marriage offers us an analogy wherein, "the reciprocal relationship between the spouses, husband and wife, should be understood by Christians according to the image of the relationship between Christ and the Church."²³ For this perspective, human marriage only makes sense in light of this fundamental context of meaning. For a full exposition of this meaning, we can now turn to St. Paul.

ST. PAUL AND MARRIAGE TYPOLOGY

Ephesians 5:21-32 is one of the New Testament's most developed treatments on marital relations. Paul's focus here is not primarily about power. Yet the manner in which he articulates the divine *telos* of the spousal relationship informs our larger theodicy question concerning the inequality of male/female power. Key to a proper reading of this passage is the observation that Paul pointedly describes the marriage relationship as an image of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the church. For Paul, marriage typologically points beyond itself to an ultimate fulfillment in Christ's marriage to the church. Which is to say, marriage is fundamentally about Christ and the gospel. Note carefully the significance of the last sentence of verse 32 within its context.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Eph 5:29-33)²⁴

Throughout his treatment on marriage, Paul is discussing the relational dynamics of the husband and wife. And as he gives instruction to husbands

something. What that something is must be sought elsewhere—in this case St. Paul's Christ/church marriage typology.

²³John Paul, *TOB*, 89.9; 90.

²⁴All scriptural quotations in this chapter are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

and wives about how they are to treat one other, he draws a tight parallel between human marriage and Christ's relationship with the church. The way Christ treats the church, Paul tells us, serves as the pattern for the way in which a husband is to treat his wife. And the way the church relates to Christ is the way a wife is to relate to her husband. But by what logic does Paul ask husbands and wives to relate to one another as Christ and the church? The answer is found in verse 32. The oneness of human marriage, Paul tells us, "refers to Christ and the church."²⁵ Drawing upon the ancient marriage formula of Genesis 2:24, Paul reveals that sexual oneness within marriage was created by God, *from the beginning*, to serve as a typological foreshadowing of the spiritual oneness that has now begun to exist between Christ and his church—a oneness that has eternally existed in God's intent.²⁶

And here we must press the *purposefulness* of the typological nature of human marriage. That marriage is a type of the gospel is not merely a happy coincidence of human history. But rather, by linking his comments to Genesis 2, the apostle assures us that *from the beginning*, God created the human marriage relationship to reflect the higher reality of the Christ/church relationship. Though human marriage came first historically, it is preceded logically by Christ's union with the church. Or again, human marriage is a type of Christ and the church, not the other way around. Or again, the Christ/church union precedes and supersedes all other marital unions. Human marriage is, from the beginning, full of divine intentionality.²⁷

²⁵For John Paul II, the marital commands would have no grounding if marriage were not fundamentally about Christ and the church. The analogy "illuminates the mystery, and is illuminated by the mystery," *TOB*, 90.2. The church has traditionally understood the marriage relationship through a typological framework. See 2 Clement 14:2; Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1.60; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III.42.1; John Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 317-18; Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1970), 223; Jonathan Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ, 1758," in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 186; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), §45.3, 285-324. Many modern evangelical commentators embrace this typological interpretation as well.

²⁶The two preceding paragraphs are drawn from Gerald Hiestand, "A Biblical Theological Approach to Premarital Sexual Ethics: Or, What Saint Paul Would Say About 'Making Out,'" *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 1.1 (June 2014): 22-23.

²⁷The New Testament's many references to the church as the "bride" of Christ, and to Christ as the "bridegroom" further highlights the typological nature of marriage—so too Christ's use of the wedding motif as an illustration of his return and consummate union with the church. And

All of this provides a theological rationale for Paul as to the way Christians are to behave in marriage. Just as we give ourselves to Christ in the free surrender of ourselves to One who is sovereign over us, that we might joyfully receive him, so too the wife joyfully receives the husband.²⁸ And just as Christ in turn exercises his lordship over us in a way that does not seek his own ends but rather seeks our highest good, so too the husband gives himself to the wife.

And most significantly for our purposes, not only does the Christ/church analogy offer us a theological framework for understanding the New Testament's proscribed marital *behavior*, it also offers us a theological framework for understanding the divinely created marital *ontology*—why the man and woman exist as they do in relation to the other. Thus reflection on the power dynamics of the Christ/church relationship informs our understanding of the power dynamics between the husband and the wife, and then between men and women more generally.²⁹

It is clear that Christ—as the heavenly bridegroom—occupies a position of strength in relation to the church. And it is likewise clear that the church occupies a position of vulnerability in relation to Christ. And this power disparity is not due to the debilitating effects of sin, but more deeply, to nature. Christ's divine nature gives him a native strength that the church does not inherently possess. And indeed, this inequality of power is central to the entire narrative of Christ and the church, for it is precisely because the church occupies a position of vulnerability that Christ comes as her suitor. If the church possessed by nature the same power and strength that Christ possessed, there would be no gospel story.

But it's important here to note how this power relation is worked out in the Christ/church relationship. Christ uses his greater power for the exaltation of

the book of Revelation explicitly refers to the wedding supper of the Lamb as inaugurating the dawn of the eternal age. See also 1 Cor 6:16-17, where Paul links the "one-flesh" union of a man and a woman with the "one spirit" union between Christ and the believer.

²⁸John Paul II comments here that the wife's submission to the husband "consists in experiencing his love." See John Paul II, *TOB*, 92.6.

²⁹Our larger discussion relates to power and gender dynamics beyond the spousal relationship. Yet the spousal relationship anchors all other male/female relationships, insofar as the spousal relationship stands uniquely and primordially at the headwaters of humanity's original creation. It is the divinely appointed means for the continuation of our species and cannot be relativized as merely one form of male/female relationship among many. As such, a close reading of the divine intent for marriage provides a framework for thinking more generally about the use and distribution of power in all forms of male/female relations.

his bride. This runs counter to the way the world typically uses power, where power is used to advance one's own agenda. Jesus shows us the proper use of power in the upper room. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands," dressed himself as a servant and washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:3). The proper use of power is to put it in the service of sacrificial love. And even more fully, Jesus shows us the proper use of power at the cross. "Could I not call twelve legions of angels?" Jesus asks when the soldiers come for him. Yet rather than using the endless power at his disposal to seek his own safety, he used his power to secure the safety of his bride.

What's more, it is not simply that Jesus *uses* his power on behalf of his bride. He goes further and actually *shares* his power by sharing wholly of himself in such a way that all that he has becomes hers. Christ lifts up his bride to rule and reign with him in the age to come. He grants his "natural" strength—his deity via his Holy Spirit—to the church, and makes his bride a coruler with him of the kingdom of God. And for her part, the church (idealized in glory), entrusts herself to Christ and embraces/welcomes the benevolent use of his power on her behalf. She conveys her love for Christ through submission to his will. Yet she is not simply a passive presence in relation to Christ—a mere receiver of grace—but actively partners with him in his purposes now (2 Cor 6:1, "working together with him") and will reign with him in the coming kingdom (Rev 21–22). What's more, the church never confuses her exaltation *by* Christ with independence *from* Christ; she does not seize upon grace as an occasion for disregard. The fact that Christ has exalted her to a place of equality, to be a coruler with him, does not cause her to honor him less, but more.

Christ sacrifices himself for his bride that she might be glorified to a place of mutual dignity and respect. And it is precisely *because* of the power disparity between Christ and the church that Christ's love is so worthy of admiration. Sacrificial love can and does exist within egalitarian power relations, but it is magnified and amplified in nonegalitarian power relations.

LIVING FAITHFULLY INTO THE CHRIST/CHURCH TYPOLOGY

It is from this vantage point that we can begin to shape a theodicy with respect to the inequality of male/female power. Following John Paul II and the apostle Paul, we conclude that the woman was created to be physically

vulnerable in relation to the man so that the selfless kind of other-exalting love that Christ expresses on behalf of the church, and the honor and deference the church shows to Christ, might be more readily manifest between the husband and the wife. The physical power disparity between husband and wife typologically matches the power disparity between Christ and the church. Like Christ, the husband is to use his greater physical strength not to advance his own agenda, but rather is to deploy his power for the betterment of his wife. And like the church, the wife is not to resent her husband's greater power but is to respect and honor it and gladly welcome its benevolent deployment on her behalf.

The power dynamics at play in Christ's relationship with the church and the husband's relationships with the wife provide for us a framework for thinking about the power relationship between men and women more generally. Following the ultimate pattern of Christ and the church, and the penultimate pattern of the husband and wife, those in positions of power (in this case, men, considered generally) are to use that power for the betterment and promotion of those in the less powerful position (in this case, women, considered generally).

The feminist movements have been good for women in many ways, most notably the way that they have drawn attention to the very real suffering and marginalization of women. But these movements have failed women insofar as they have tried to rectify this abuse by seeking, as their primary objective, the elimination of the power gap between men and women. We have too often sought the path of Caenis—to put pain beyond the power of women by attempting to eliminate feminine vulnerability. There is some wisdom in this approach. But Caenis's answer can never be the final answer. Paglia again: "Political equality for women, desirable and necessary as it is, is not going to remedy the radical disjunction between the sexes that begins and ends in the body."³⁰ Women will always occupy a position of vulnerability in relation to men. This cannot be changed insofar as it is inexorably connected to divinely ordered biology. It is God himself who has ordained the power gap, and he has done so precisely because the inequality of power allows for the unique demonstration of Christ-exalting, sacrificial love in

³⁰Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 21.

ways that would not be as possible in a completely egalitarian power structure. Thus the final answer to abuse is not a futile attempt to eliminate the power gap but trust in God's design and Christlike love.

In the intramural Christian gender debates, we can too often get caught up in arguing about who should be in the power position—as though we had the ability to rewrite this aspect of creation. The New Testament does not so much insist that husbands *should* be in the power position (as though this were determined according to arbitrary social constructs), but rather it simply and realistically acknowledges that husbands are, and then gives instruction about how men are to use their greater power.

Here it may be helpful to distinguish between “power as force” and “power as authority.” While the two often run together, they are not the same. Authority can be possessed by those with a lesser capacity for force. A 5'6, 130-pound police officer has a level of authority equal to his 6'4, 270-pound partner, yet the latter has a greater capacity for force. In a physical altercation between the two officers and a violent noncompliant suspect, it is force, not authority, that is the decisive determiner. And of course, this is seen clearly in the fact that the noncompliant suspect has disregarded the authority of both officers and has moved straight into a raw power struggle. Many conversations around the topic of headship and submission in marriage focus too narrowly on the issue of authority without proper consideration of power. However much we might press toward an egalitarian *authority* structure in the spousal relationship, we cannot override biology and create a completely egalitarian *power* structure.

It is here that evangelical conversations on gender can lose their way. Too often our notions of gender equality conflate “equality of power” with “equality of worth” and thus assume that equality of power is the only kind of equality that counts. This is an essentially Nietzschean view of power and worth. If equality of power is the only way to affirm the equal value of the sexes, then male/female biology has doomed equality from the start. The Christ/church typological framework helps us see that an inequality of power is not inherently totalizing or demeaning, but rather has the potential to reveal the beauty of the gospel and sacrificial love.

But we must say more. The fact that God has hardwired a perpetual power gap into male/female relations does not logically lead to the conclusion that

God's design for men and women is a static power relationship. Here the Christ/church marriage typology needs to critique evangelical complementarian perspectives on gender. Too often complementarian notions of gender, while benevolent, fail to mirror the *empowering* reality of Christ and his relationship with the church. Christ doesn't just deploy his power on behalf of his bride; he *shares* his power with his bride. We are, according to Paul's Ephesians vision, raised up with Christ and seated with him "in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come" (Eph 1:20-23; see also Eph 2:6). If we lose sight of this aspect of Christ's relationship with the church, we inevitably end up with patronizing notions of male power. Women are pushed into overtly passive roles, while those in the power position (men)—even though exercising their power benevolently—feel no compulsion to share their greater power with women. What results is a static, nontransferable use of male power that all too often results in the subtle treatment of women as children rather than as coheirs of grace and corulers in the kingdom of God. Women are denied the opportunity to use their gifts in ways that lead God's people into a deeper relationship with Christ. This is a loss for both women and men. Any model of Christian gender relations that fails to meaningfully incorporate Christ's sharing of power with his bride misses the mark, and does not do justice to God's ideal.

Yet there is limit to how this power can be transferred. Christ does not transfer his power to the church in a way that makes the church independent of and no longer in need of Christ—as though Jesus were able to give away his power to the church like a rich person gives away money to a poor person, who now being in possession of wealth, is no longer in need of the rich person. Rather Christ's empowerment of the church comes in the form of his Spirit, which is his own presence. In this way, Christ shares his power only insofar as he shares himself; and the church rises on the high tide of Christ's power only insofar as the church dwells in relation to and lives in dependence upon Christ. The church's strength is always borrowed; we never become a divine person, eternal and uncreated.

The same pattern holds for how men share power with women. It is not possible for men to give away their greater capacity for physical force, as

though it were a commodity; they can only share the benefit of this capacity, not the capacity itself. Thus while it is the duty and glory of the man to lift up and exalt the woman into a place of mutual equality, whatever the nature of this equality, it does not mean that the husband sends his wife into the basement at 2 a.m. to find out what that crashing noise was while he stays safely tucked beneath the blankets. The husband does not exalt the wife by cutting her off from his protective and sacrificial love; he cannot send his greater physical power with his wife into the basement while he remains in his bed. If we are not clear on this point, male attempts to “share power” become little more than male abdications of masculine responsibility.³¹

As such, male power-sharing can only occur when men dwell in benevolent and harmonious relation with women. Men must not quit the field, retreating into passivity, thinking that they can hand off their greater physical power like a commodity. Such misbegotten attempts ultimately leave women overburdened and underempowered. Like Paglia, I believe a primary mistake of the feminist movement has been its insistence (perpetuated by both men and women) that women can achieve equality with men independent of men.³² It is precisely because the church embraces and consciously lives into Christ’s greater power that she is exalted into a place of equality. In the same way, the greater power of the man is the very means by which the woman attains equality herself.

The Scriptures paint a clear picture of gender complementarity—the man is not independent of the woman, nor is the woman independent of the man. The story of Genesis is the story of life—the man shares his life with the woman and she in turn gives it back again. The life by which Eve lives is Adam’s, for she is drawn forth from his side. But she is rightly called Eve—the living one, the Mother of Life, and the one through whom he finds his life again.

CONCLUSION

The year 2012 marked the hundred-year anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic; over fifteen hundred men, women, and children were lost. But the

³¹I am thinking here of women serving in military combat roles, as firemen, police officers, etc. The contemporary push to treat women as though they were men is a form of power-sharing that ultimately isolates women from the benevolent protection of male power. Complementarians will likewise see a logic here that extends to the debates regarding the ordination of women.

³²See Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 9.

casualties were not equally dispersed among the passengers. Only 20 percent of the men survived, compared with 70 percent of the women and children. But the contrasting survival rates weren't just rotten luck. The reason a higher percentage of women and children survived is because the majority of the men on the ship deployed their greater physical power in service of the women and children and because the women and children submitted themselves to this benevolent use of masculine power. And it is precisely the inequality of power that makes the sacrifice of the men of the Titanic so meaningful. They could have saved themselves; they could have used their greater physical power to preserve their own lives. But in sacrificial love they deployed their power for the sake of those in the vulnerable position. It was a distinctly Christian use of power.³³

Ultimately, men are not called to go down with the ship because they are better at drowning but rather quite the opposite. In a strictly "tooth and claw" world, men are in fact much more capable of staying alive. And it is for precisely this reason that men are called first to die. The sacrifice of power on behalf of the vulnerable more closely reflects the beauty of the Christ/church relationship. When men and women navigate the power structure of the male/female relationship in harmony with the Christ/church relationship—the man laying down his life in love in order that he might raise up the woman to a place of equality and glory, and the woman at peace with her vulnerability, honoring the man and embracing the deployment of benevolent power on her behalf, taking her place alongside him as a coregent of the coming kingdom—there is great beauty and happiness. The Caenis option, while seeming the safer and surer route to safety, in the end robs men, and most especially women, of their inherent beauty and dignity. Better to live into the way of Christ and his church, trusting that God, in his perfect time, will put all pain beyond our power—not by robbing us of our vulnerability, but by perfecting and protecting us in Christ.

³³In the same vein, millionaires John Jacob Astor and Benjamin Guggenheim refused to use their wealth and privilege to secure for themselves places on the lifeboats, choosing rather to give up their seats for the women and children and to go down with the ship.