

Transcript of Professor Mary Anne Case on Complementarity  
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Thank you so much for having me. I should also point out that my first research project ever as a high school astuteness, was to research the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. I am old enough that this was before *Inter Insigniores*, before the church had definitively, given reasons why women could not be ordained. And when I studied at the University of Munich, I happened to study with Germany's first ever professor of Women's Studies who happened to be a classmate in theology of Joseph Ratzinger. Her name is Elizabeth Guzman, and she produced a thesis on Hildegard of Bingen. I think that this might have had something to do with Benedict XVI thinking to make Hildegard a Doctor of the Church.

But when Elizabeth Guzman presented her thesis, the theology department said, "Wait a minute, we don't give degrees to women." The philosophy department said, "We'll take it." And so, she did not get, a theology degree, but eventually became a professor of theology very late in her life at the same university at which she studied. So when I say I, when it was said that I work in the early history of feminism, I mean, very early. I work in medieval sources and this is one of the things that caused me to investigate the origins of the churches' view of complementarity. As Susan Ross, who I think may have spoken to this group, but whose work you probably know in any event has said, the medieval church, the fathers, and I will argue also, the scriptures do not have a notion of complementary.

I'm going to set forth in my history of complementary. Complementary is an invention of the second half of the 20th century. And it is the theologians' attempt to square the circle. Before the late 20th century, everyone who argued that men and women were equal argued that they were essentially the same. And everyone who argued that men and women were different, argued that men were better. I'll go through the history of complementarity as I had planned to. I will recommend to you the piece that I think Deborah was referring to, which is a publicly available.

In the invention of complementarity, I am going to begin someplace I wasn't planning to begin. When I saw that the program included the Petrine and the Marian principles as referenced by Pope Francis, I thought, oh, no, that's exactly what I'm not equipped to talk about, because that comes from the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar of which I'm not acquainted with.

But then I started looking at the Francis interview more closely, and that is where I will begin. Pope Francis was interviewed by America Magazine, "Who is Jorge Bergolio?" This is actually an earlier interview. He is, perhaps I can say a bit astute, but it is also true that he is a bit naive. I think that s s up Francis very well, and it's what it's both. That lead him in the most recent America interview to reference the Petrine combination with the Marian principle. Here's what I mean when I say Francis is a bit naive. Francis is not a theologian. Francis has often expressed this himself. His views on the nature of women, the nature of men and women, their

relationships in church, I would argue grow out of deep, I'll use the word "prejudice" that he is afflicted by -- the notion of *machismo* and *Marianismo* that is deeply rooted in Latin American thinking and feeling about sex and gender.

He, in a sense, acknowledges that by talking repeatedly about it -- *machismo* -- that women would adopt it if they were to get leadership roles or authority in the church. If time permits, I will go through some of the casual, offhand remarks that Francis makes that indicate his naivete. But I'm going to argue here is his astuteness. what I'm going to argue is that, that in referencing the Petrine principle, Francis is updating, in a way that we as feminists in the church should value. The argument of *Inter Insigniores* updated the arguments of Aquinas on women's ordination. And I'll come back to *Inter Insigniores* and Aquinas in a moment, but let me first say, here's the context in Hans Urs von Balthasar's Petrine principle. It is not the case for Hans Urs von Balthasar that there are two principles, masculine and feminine, Petrine and Marian, but rather, there are, for him, five principles.

And it won't surprise people who are used to the apostolic prayers, referencing Mary and the twelve apostles, that among these five principles, women are outnumbered. Women, represent, one of the five principles, the Marian principle. The other four are the Petrine, the Pauline, the Johannine and the Jacobine. Note that three out of the four men are apostles and also ordained. Francis for reasons, either of, lack of information or of astuteness or naivete, doesn't mention all of this, but sets up the Petrine as opposed to the Marian principle. And I'm going to argue again that this is potentially an advance for the perspective of arguments, for the ordination of women. Here's what I mean by that. If you look at, medieval arguments about the ordination of women, you've got Aquinas who follows Aristotle saying that women are lesser misbegotten males.

And his argument as to why a woman cannot be a priest is, "Since there cannot be signified in the feminine sex, any eminence of degree, since woman holds a state of objection, therefore, she cannot receive the sacrament of orders." So, again, women can't be ordained because men are better, women are naturally subordinate, and the priest cannot be taken from a group naturally subordinate. By the time the church finally feels the need to up its theological grounding about the ordination, *Inter Insigniores*, again, in my lifetime, it develops this theory that the priest has to image Christ and since Christ is a male, women cannot image Christ in this way.

I'm wearing my pin from back in the day that says "Ordain women or stopped baptizing them" button from the St. Joan's International Alliance in the late 1970s. Because the problem with the logic of *Inter Insigniores* is that it calls into question, the very notion that women are saved, because the whole theory of salvation, is that Christ images us. And if women cannot image Christ, then how can it be that Christ can image women? How can it be that women are saved? Thus we should stop baptizing them. I should say, as someone who has studied medieval arguments this is not a new argument. There were plenty of people in the Middle Ages in the early modern period who said that women were waiting for their own redeemer. There was

even one famous writer who said, yes, and I met her, and she lives down the road to from me, who says she is going to be the Redeemer because we need our own Redeemer, which is necessary for saved. So, one of the problems is that the usual metaphors of complementarity, have in them already the heritage of inequality, right?

So, if it is Christ and Mary, already there is a lack of parallelism or equality. There's the difference between something that is divine and superior and something, however noble and pure, is merely mortal. So I want to argue that, it may not be Francis's astuteness as much as his naivete for him to substitute the Petrine principle and to make the parallel between Mary and Peter, rather than the more traditional parallel between Mary and Christ. And the parallels, that preexist that feed into the heritage of complementarity, you'll see immediately the, the problem with it, once I run through the nuptial metaphor, which is the metaphor that very often is seen to govern. So the nuptial metaphor, which the popes are very fond of, establishes parallelism between the following nuptial pairs -- Yahweh and the people of Israel, Christ and the Church, the priest and the people, the husband and wife.

Now, a moment's reflection will tell you that the first set of marriages are not Christian marriages. They're Jewish marriages. They're hierarchical, role differentiated, and potentially polygamous. The husband and the wife in Canon law, in Christian theology, have always been treated as equal. The medieval Canon law imposes exactly the same obligations on the husband as on the wife. They even take the biblical passage that is discussing a Jewish marriage, the biblical passage that talks about whether men can divorce their wives, and Jesus says, only in the case of adultery. And one of the questions is, well, you know, is this also true of the wife? And the theology then says, yes, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. There is equality in the obligations, and in the rights of husbands and wives in the canon law of marriage.

So where does complementarity come from?

First of all, what is complementarity? I don't do PowerPoint that much. I do old-fashioned visual aids. So, my old-fashioned visual aid today is I'm wearing the image of Adam from the Sistine ceiling, and I'm doing this illustratively. You can interpret my wearing Adam in two different ways that go back to the two different Genesis stories, right? You can either say, I'm Eve, I'm the rib inside waiting to emerge from Adam. And my visual aid for this is my complementarity swatch watch. It's a circle of the h an being with a male and a female on it. But you'll see the male is dominant and they don't look very happy. And I put the back on my wrist, you'll see that I've got a snake heading toward it, the snake of the of the Garden of Eden.

On my other wrist I've got what the way I would prefer we think about this. I'm labeling myself h an. That seems to me to be the only category when we're talking about essences. So, the other way of reading this shirt is I am Adam, right? I am the h an. I am not just the female inside waiting to emerge in a sex differentiated world. As someone familiar with medieval theology and a reader of the scriptures, but also familiar with what intellectual historians called the invention of the sexes -- that is to say that the notion that, it wasn't until sometime in the

19th century that, even people studying biology thought that men and women were essentially different. I wanted to learn the history, as best as I could, and I started with the work of Sr. Prudence Allen, who may be familiar to you.

If you haven't heard her in any other context, you may, recall that she is one of the people Francis called "strawberries on the cake." That is to say she is one of the theologians selected by Pope Francis for a theological commission. And, he described the women's theologians to whom he had added, whom he had added to this commission as the "strawberries on the cake." Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza famously said, "Well, if women are the strawberries, what are men? The nuts?"

But, Sr. Prudence Allen had, at the time I started my research, published two volumes of a history of the theology of women in which she was looking for the origins of complementarity. And I read through it, and I saw many authors about whom I had written, including, for example, Christine de Pizan, the author of the famous "City of Ladies," one of the first, named women professional authors, and also one of the first feminists in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

And I didn't see any trace of complementarity in it. And I actually wrote Sister Prudence and said, "You know, tell me if I'm missing something, but there isn't any complementarity in what you have pointed out. Because again, everyone who thought the sexes were equal thought they were the same. Any everyone who thought sexes were essentially different thought that men were better. And she said, "Wait for my third volume." And she very kindly actually sent me a copy of her third volume.

What that demonstrated for me was what I had already suspected, which is that neither the word nor the concept complementarity have any precedent before the 20th century. Indeed, the person credited with the invention of the term complementarity, Dietrich von Hildebrand, doesn't use the term in German. I happen among other things, to be a native speaker of German today, the theological term in German for complementarity is *komplementarität*.

He doesn't use that term. He uses terms like it, but once the theory of complementarity starts getting generated by Hildebrand, someone like he and his wife read back into church history and theological history complementarity that really isn't there. So Alice Von Hildebrand for example, pairs up all of these saints to friends like Francis and Claire, a mother and son, a brother and sister, Benedict and Scholastica, and transforms them into complementary couples. Even there, though there is not in the ordinary hagiographies of them, a sense of them as embodying essentially, feminine or masculine qualities.

So if we start as far back as possible, which is with, the Scriptures, we don't see complementarity in the New Testament, right? The women of the New Testament are not particularly feminine in their behaviors, nor the men quintessentially, masculine. I think one of the problems is the tendency of people like Benedict to read back feminine qualities into, for

example, Mary, where they really aren't to be found. Benedict infamously calls Mary "silent." I think if you read the New Testament, you see she's anything but silent. She doesn't say "yes" until she gets her questions answered by the angel. The Magnificat is a long, eloquent, piece of speaking by Mary. She doesn't say silent at the at the wedding feast, she gives orders. She tells Jesus to make some wine, and he does it, right? This is not silence. This is not quintessentially feminine qualities. Nor, do any of the men of the New Testament exhibit, particularly, masculine qualities there. And this notion of the firm division is one that again, arises much later --in the Middle Ages.

Again, it would've been deemed a heresy to say souls had a sex. Sex was seen to be an accident, as opposed to an essence. That is to say, not something that goes all the way down. And I think it's not until you get to John Paul II that you see the notion that sex is essential. And interestingly, he takes precisely the creation story that his predecessors in theology and in the papacy, would've seen as evidence of the equality of the sexes or their lack of differentiation, in the line, "Male and female, he created them." That is to say, not the creation story that differentiates Adam from me, but the one that has the sexes created together and says -- and this is new -- that proves [to John Paul II] that the one thing that goes all the way down, the one essential difference among h an beings is the difference of sex. Because look, there it was in the beginning, and he [John Paul II] quotes the New Testament, where Jesus quotes the Old Testament, in the course of saying that husbands can't divorce their wives except for adultery, because in the beginning, God made them, male and female.

Now, one of the things that happens when the Popes try and develop this theory of the essential differences of sex is that they have real trouble with the language that they are working in. So, Benedict XVI, when he was still Ratzinger and the head of the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith, issued, *The Declaration on the Role of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*. Now, I invite your attention to this. One of the interesting things that happens, in translation to English of Pope Francis, of Benedict, of many of John Paul II [writings] *Muleris Dignitatem* is another example, is that what appears in the text as singular, very often gets translated as plural.

So, what is Francis asking for? A deeper theology of women, or a deeper theology of woman? Is John Paul II declaring the dignity of women or the dignity of woman? I would argue that very often the use of in the original language is singular. And, that is dangerous because that it essentializes, women into woman, and it facilitates this use of woman as metaphor rather than women as h an. It makes Francis able to say, woman is the church.

Now, I want also to point out that, as you know, I'm talking here to a bunch of people in the church, interested in the role of women in the church, interested in theology. One of the main reasons I came to my study of the history of complementary is because I'm a secular lawyer interested in secular law. And one of the things I was interested in was the way in which, the Catholic Church and its spokespeople and in particular, Benedict XVI from way back when in the 1980s when he was still just the head of the Congregation, of the Doctrine of the Faith, had interested themselves in changes in secular law.

Benedict XVI was obsessed with secular law and was as early as back in the 1980s. I have a piece, also that if you're interested in learning more, I published in the journal *Signs* in which I look at both at the way in which Benedict XVI on the one hand, and, Francis on the other, have their views on gender and on the secular law of gender shaped by what the countries of origins were like at the time they left them. When Benedict, when Ratzinger left Germany, Germany had just issued through its constitutional court the most progressive opinion in the world on trans rights and was also moving in a feminist direction. And this worried Ratzinger. Similarly, when Francis left to become Pope, Argentina had just become the most progressive country in the world on trans rights. This disturbed both of them.

This turn toward the secular, I would argue, is not new. When I looked for the origins of complementarity, as I said, I could not find them in Hildebrand. I could not find them in any of the sources that Sister Allen pointed me to. Where did I find the most comprehensive statement of what the church now says is its doctrinal complementarity that it sets against what it calls gender ideology? I found it in a really obscure document by Pius XII, issued again in the second half of the 20th century, immediately after World War II. And it's not a document about theology, it's a document about politics. Pius II is speaking to women and facing the fact that the Italian constitution is now going to give women the right to vote. So, he has to deal with the fact that women are now going to be political actors. And he describes complementarity as the appropriate response of women to their new political rights. Just because you have the right to vote doesn't mean that you are displaced in the family. It doesn't mean that your essential feminine nature and feminine differences are going to be affected.

So, the thing that I discovered that surprised me was that it's not the case that complementarity started in the church and in theology, and then only later moved into the world and into politics. No, it has its origins in the church's response to secular law. And this gets to the final thing that I will mention for this talk before I open it up for questions, which is the relationship between the church's new obsession with complementarity and its opposition to what it calls gender ideology.

I don't know familiar you are with the church's opposition to gender ideology. It has been a feature of Catholic politics in most of the rest of the world, other than the United States for decades. It only recently came back to the United States in the last five or ten years. And my argument about this is that what complementarity really is, is the essentializing of stereotypes about males and females. And in much of the rest of the world, those stereotypes still have purchase or can have purchase in secular law.

I don't know how many of you followed this, but when the French government in 2013 introduced legislation to recognize same sex marriage, hundreds of thousands of people inspired by Catholics and in particular by people in the Catholic hierarchy and Catholic theologians, took to the streets of Paris to protest this, to say this was terrible. And one of the signs that they carried in their protests was, "Don't touch our stereotypes" with an image of a little girl in a pink princess outfit and a little boy in a superhero costume. That would not have

been possible in the United States because Ruth Bader Ginsburg got there first, right? I'm a constitutional lawyer above all, and as a constitutional lawyer, I can tell you that the constitutional law, the United States, due to the activities of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, when she was a litigator for the ACLU, says that, at least until this court decides to dismantle these holdings, that there can be, "no fixed notions concerning the roles and abilities of males and females embodied in law." Thus, stereotypes are unconstitutional.

Now, that is something I think you can read in the Gospels, right? Mary and Martha are both women and living their roles very differently. One taking on the Jewish masculine role of learning, the other taking on the more traditional role of working. But both in law and in theology, these roles should not be essentialized. And I'm hoping that as Francis has moved toward the Petrine principle, he can now acknowledge that there's not just the Petrine principle, but all of these other principles that was described so that we can move all of these principles away from essentializing sex and gender of the people who occupy them. But, I can't be that optimistic because, again, I think Francis is stuck in traditional ways. In another America interview his earliest one points out that one of the few things he brought with him from Argentina was a picture of was an image of St. Joseph sleeping that he carries with him all the time. Francis has. It was, I said it was bad enough that the ratio of, of women to men in the prayers of the mass was one to twelve. Francis made it worse. He inserted St. Joseph into all of the prayers so that there is no woman without male headship. Now, the Protestant churches have had a notion of complementarianism far longer than the Catholic churches have complementarity, but complementarianism is associated with male headship and female subordination, which again, is not the medieval, the canon law theistic or the gospel way. I fear, however it may be the way of Francis. (End of presentation)