THE DIGNITY AND THE VOCATION OF THE WOMAN IN THE APOSTOLIC LETTER MULIERIS DIGNITATEM

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Abstrak:

Masalah keterlibatan dan tanggungjawab perempuan dalam hidup dan tugas perutusan Gereja merupakan topik diskusi teologis yang senantiasa aktual dibicarakan. Tulisan ini mau menguraikan pandangan resmi Gereja terhadap martabat dan panggilan perempuan dalam hidup Gereja menurut perspektif Surat Apostolik Paus Yohanes Paulus II *Mulieris Dignitatem.* Dasar refleksi martabat dan panggilan perempuan adalah misteri perempuan – Maria, Bunda Kristus. Ada dua dimensi dalam panggilan perempuan, yakni keibuan dan kemurnian yang menyatu dengan cara yang istimewa. Keibuan merupakan pelestari anugerah dan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan. Kemurnian berarti pemberian diri secara utuh kepada Tuhan dalam memperjuangkan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan dan keselamatan. Kedua dimensi ini saling melengkapi. Pada pribadi Maria kedua dimensi panggilan seorang perempuan itu melekat erat dan dihidupi secara dinamis dan setia.

Key Words:

Dignity, vocation, motherhood, virginity, mutual relationship, gift of self, order of love.

1. Introduction

In the inaugural address of the International congress to mark the 20th Anniversary of *"Mulieris Dignitatem"*, Cardinal Rylko said that it is a consequence of "a new cultural paradigms" and among these, there are two dominant tendencies of radical feminism: "Empowerment", which wants to defend femininity, "making woman the antagonist of man"; and the "ideology of gender", which wants to eliminate sexual difference, understanding it "exclusively as the result of socio-cultural conditioning". Femininity and masculinity are complementary, not only from the physical dam psychological point of view, but ontologically. And the man-woman relationship is natural and answers to God's plan, which is the unity of the two, which enables each to experience their interpersonal and reciprocal relationship as a gift which enriches and confers responsibility.

For this reason, we need to profound this *"Mulieris Dignitatem,* which explains the two important points: dignity and vocation of woman in theological and anthropological perspectives. Understanding it well, we could be promoters of a new "feminism", which knew how to recognize and express the true feminine genius in all of its manifestations of civil coexistence, overcoming all forms of discrimination, violence and abuse, as John Paul II wished.

2. Background dan Perspective of *Mulieris Dignitatem*

2.1. Historical Background

The Apostolic letter from Pope John Paul II *Mulieris Dignitatem* has a connection with the synod of bishops that happened in October 1987. In the synod, the bishops discussed about vocation and missions of laymen in the Church and the world after seventy years of the second Vatican Council. In the discussing, they asked about an active participations and a responsibility of laymen, men and woman, in the Church's life and missions; especially the question about what can and must woman do for the Church and society. The questions could be answered adequately if only Church understood the anthropological and theological root of existence of human being, men and woman. First step, therefore, the Church has to understand the fundamental question about identity of woman, "who is woman?" Pope John Paul II answers explicitly the bishops' question in his letter. He said that anthropologists and theologians must study hard for overcoming some problems connecting with the true knowledge and the dignity of both sex. The knowledge about dignity of woman is a base for exhortation apostolic post-synod to reexamine the woman's presence in the Church and the society.

Pope announced his apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* that was produced on the feast of Mary was assumed into Heaven, in an audience with bishops from the State of Unity. In this audience, Pope said to them that it was important to explain the basic principles of Christian feminism in each effort of understanding well about humanity[1]. Hence, the Church decided to use her authority of teaching for serving and helping the woman who protect their dignity and vocation in the modern world. Then, this apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* has been published on September 30th 1988. It presents general and fundamental attentions aspects of anthropological and theological basic root of dignity and vocation of woman. In this letter Pope continued discussion of synod by dialog, hearing their questions and anxiety about place, active presence and participations of woman in the Church on the context biblical faith and theological traditions. Pope meditated the dignity and vocation of woman in perspective of the design of God. He agreed with the bishop's synod 1987

that urged Church for deepening fundamental anthropological and theological existence of human being.

2.2. Two Perspectives of the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*

As it has been written before that this apostolic letter reflects woman's dignity, places and participations in the Church and society by two perspectives: theological and anthropological perspectives. *First*, it is the theological perspective. It has four dimensions: Trinity, Christology, Ecclesiology, and Mariology. The letter was closed by thankfulness to The Trinity for "the mystery of woman"; but also The Trinity's presence and works were recorded in the Pope's meditations. The creation of human being, men and woman, are image and likeness of Triune God; because it is a prelude to definitive auto-revelation union of love of Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Men and woman are called to live in the union of love, and their union reflects love of God. In the dimension of Christology, woman was contemplated in image of God, but this image was revealed from and in Christ. The dignity of woman consists in the supernatural elevation to union with God in Jesus Christ, which determines the ultimate finality of the existence of every person both on earth and in eternity. From this point of view, the woman is the representative and the archetype of the whole human race, she represents the humanity which belongs to all human beings, both men and woman. The event at Nazareth highlights a form of union with God. It can only belong to the woman – Mary; the union between mother and son. In ecclesiological dimension, then, the letter of Paul to the Corinthians was used for explaining the union of love between Christ with Church: men and woman as his spouse. The great mystery of Christ's love to his spouse reached the top on the cross. Finally, it is the Marian dimension. Actually the whole of pope's letter is a continuous hymn for Mary, virgin mother as an ideal sample for every woman. In the beginning of this letter Pope indicated that the year was dedicated to Mary for comparing subject of discussing on woman's dignity and vocation; and at the end of it, he prayed in order that all of woman may discover themselves and their "supreme vocation".

Second, it is the anthropological perspective. To enter in anthropological scope, Pope offered ontological, psychological, ethical, social, and cultural advices for putting in the light of the wealth of the human reality of woman. The reflection on dignity and vocation of woman is not only seeing the woman herself, but also it sees her relations with man. Feminism is always considered in the context of relation with masculine; it is impossible to discuss on woman and feminism without discussing about masculine. In another words, the feminism cannot be separated from masculine because they are unity of the two. They do not represent a differentiation or a contravention of

humanity, but they impress "the otherness" of the meaning and value of their existence. Even their reciprocal relation imagines the mystery of Trinity. Pope reassumed a theological correlation of the inter-subjective mystery between men and woman in their relationship by using term "unity of the two". In the setting of the biblical "beginning", the revealed truth concerning man as "the image and likeness" of God constitutes the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology. *"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"* (Gn 1:27). This concise passage contains the fundamental anthropological truths. The man is the high point of the whole order of creation in the visible world; the human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation; both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image. This image and likeness of God, which is essential for the human being, is passed on by the man and woman, as spouses and parents to their descendents.

3. Reflection on the Dignity and Vocation of Women

The dignity and vocation of woman – a subject of constant human and Christian reflection – have gained exceptional prominence in recent years. This can be seen in some of the statements of the Church's *Magisterium*, especially in documents of the second Vatican Council: the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* 8, 9, 60 and the Decree on the Apostolate of the laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 9. Even similar thinking had already been put forth in the period before the Council, for instance some of Pope Pius XII's Discourses[2] and in the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of Pope John XXIII. After the second Vatican Council, Paul VI, at the request of the 1971 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, set up a special commission for the study of contemporary problems concerning the "*effective promotion of the dignity and the responsibility of woman*". He had said in one of his discourses that within Christianity, more than in any other religion, and since its very beginning, woman has had a special dignity. The woman, therefore, is meant to form part of living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not all their potentialities have been made clear yet.

3.1. This shall be Called Woman

In the description found in Genesis 2:18-25, the woman is created by God "from the rib" of the man and is placed at his side as another "I" – as the buddy of the man. When he looked her, he said, "*bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh! This shall be called woman, for from man was this taken"* (Gn 2:23). In biblical language this name indicates her essential identity with regard to

man – *is-'issah-* something which unfortunately modern languages in general are unable to express: "she shall be called woman (*'issah*) because she was taken out of man (*is*)". The woman is another "I" in a human community. From the very beginning the man and woman appear as a "unity of the two", especially in the marital relationship. The man, therefore, leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and the tow become one flesh (Gn 2:24). Thus in this context as the creation of man and woman, the biblical account speaks of God's instituting marriage as an indispensable condition for the transmissions of life to new generations, the transmission of life to which marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordered, *"be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it"* (Gn 1:28). In this story of creation in Genesis, the woman was presented as like as man called *'adam*. She was planed and created by God as a climactic creation. As a person, she would be called *hawwah* – "a donor of life".

The book of Genesis expresses the creation of man and woman as an image and a likeness of God. In the same time, however, it also reveals what should be called the mystery of sin, and even more fully the mystery of evil which exists in the world created by God. It is impossible to understand the mystery of sin without making reference to the whole truth about the image and likeness to God, which is the basis of biblical anthropology. By means of this reference one can also understand the mystery of the "non-likeness" to God in which sin consists, and which manifests itself in the evil present in the history of the world. And that sin affected the human being – man and woman – and their lives. The book of Genesis shows the sin affect the lives of man and woman by the perspective of "toil", by which man will earn his living (cf. Gn. 3:17-19) and likewise the great "pain" with which the woman will give birth to her children (cf. Gn. 3:16). And all this is marked by the necessity of death, which is the end of human life on earth. The book of Genesis also contains the first foretelling of victory over sin. This is proved by the words in the book of Genesis 3:15, usually called the *Proto-evangelium*, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"*. It is significant that the foretelling of the redeemer contained in these words refer to the woman. The words of the *Proto-evangelium* express well the mission of woman in the redeemer's salvific struggle against the evil in human history. Eve and Mary are two female figures who are presented for reflecting about the woman's role in the salvific redemption in the scripture. In the Scripture, the woman is assigned the first place as the progenitrix of the redeemer of man. Eve – the first woman and as the mother of all the living – is the witness to the biblical "beginning", which contains the truth of the creation of man made in the image and likeness of God, the truth about original sin, and the foretelling of victory over sin. In

the Gospel, then, Mary is the witness to the new beginning and new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17), since she herself as the first of redemptive history is "a new creation": she is full of grace. The annunciation at Nazareth proved that Mary is "a new beginning" in the salvific redemption in Christ.

The words of the *Proto-evangelium* in the book of Genesis enable us to move into the context of the Gospel. Man's redemption foretold in Genesis, now becomes a reality in the person and mission of Jesus Christ, in which we also recognize what reality of the redemption means for the dignity and vocation of woman. This meaning becomes clearer if we understand well what Christ said about and his attitude toward woman in the Gospel. Sometimes the woman whom Jesus met and who received so many graces form him, also accompanied him as he journeyed with the apostles for proclaiming the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk. 8:1-3). At the other times the woman appear in the parables when he taught the truth about the Kingdom of God for his followers: the parables of the lost coin (Lk. 15:8-10), the leaven (Mt. 13:33), the wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1-13), and the story of the poor widow (Lk. 21:1-4). It is clear that in Jesus' entire teaching one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against woman prevalent in his day. On the contrary, his words, works, and attitudes always express the respect and honor due to woman. In the Gospel the woman also appear at the decisive moment in Jesus' whole messianic mission; some woman were in the forefront at the foot of the cross (cf. Jn. 19:25). At the arduous test of faith and fidelity the woman proved stronger than the apostles. In this moment of danger, those who love much succeed in overcoming their fear. Even the women are the witness of his resurrection; they are the first at the tomb and find it empty. They are the first to hear, "He is not here. He has risen" (Mt. 28:6). They are also the first to be called to announce this truth to the apostles (cf. Mt. 28: 1-10; Lk. 24: 8-11).

3.2. Mary is the Archetype of the Personal Dignity of Woman

The letter shows that the essential horizon of the reflection on the dignity and vocation of woman is the mystery of the woman - mother of God that is Mary. "*When the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born of woman*" (Gal 4:4). The Son, the Word, one in substance with the Father, becomes man, born of woman, at "the fullness of time". This event leads to the turning point of man's history on earth, understood as salvation history. The birth of the Son was annunciated by the Angel to a virgin whose name Mary. In his letter to Galatians, Paul does not call the mother of Christ by her own name "Mary", but calls her "woman". Mary who was pregnant and bore Jesus is to be found at the center of the salvific event. She is the woman who is present in the central salvific event which remarks the "fullness of time"; this event is realized in her and through her. In another words, the "fullness of

time" manifests the extraordinary dignity of the woman. On the one hand, this dignity consists in the supernatural elevation to union with God in Jesus Christ, which determines the ultimate finality of the existence of every person both on earth and in eternity. From this point of view, the "woman" is the representative and the archetype of the whole human race: she represents the humanity which belongs to all human beings, both men and woman. On the other hand, however, the event at Nazareth highlights a form of union with the living God which can only belong to the "woman" Mary: the union between mother and son. The virgin of Nazareth truly becomes the Mother of God (*Theotokos).* She is truly the Mother of God, because motherhood concerns the whole person, not just the body, nor even just human "nature". In this way the name of *Theotokos – mother of God* – became the name proper to the union with God granted to the Virgin Mary.

There is a dialogue between the Angel and Mary in the annunciation at Nazareth. In the event, the Angel extended important words to her: *"full of grace"*. Thus the whole conversation is in the context of the words; and these words "fullness of grace" that was granted to the virgin of Nazareth, with a view to the fact that she would become *Theotokos*, also signifies the fullness of the perfection of "what is characteristic of woman", of "what is feminine". Here we find, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of woman. When she responds to the words of the heavenly messenger with her *"fiat"*, she who is "full of grace" feels the need to express her personal relationship to the gift that has been revealed to her, saying *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord"* (Lk. 1: 38). In the expression "handmaid of the Lord", one senses Mary's complete awareness of being a creature of God. The word "handmaid" is inscribed throughout the whole history of the Mother and the Son. The whole Annunciation dialogue reveals the essential dimension of the event, namely, its supernatural dimension. Her union with the Son also signifies that she takes a place within Christ's messianic service. It is precisely this service which constitutes the very foundation of the Kingdom in which "to serve … means to reign". Christ, the servant of the Lord, will show all people the loyal dignity of service, the dignity which is joined in the closest possible way to the vocation of every person. This reality of "woman – Mother of God" – also determines the essential horizon of reflection on the dignity and the vocation of woman. The dignity of every human being and the vocation corresponding to that dignity find their definitive measure in union with God.

In the tradition of faith and of Christian reflection throughout the ages, the coupling Adam – Christ is often linked with that of Eve – Mary; Mary is described also as the "new" Eve. Particularly noteworthy is the meaning which sees Mary as the full revelation of all that is included in the biblical word

"woman": a revelation commensurate with the mystery of the redemption. As the "new" Eve, Mary is also the "new beginning" of the dignity and vocation of woman, of each and every woman. Mary is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation.

3.3. Two Dimensions of Woman's Vocation

There are two dimension of woman's vocation that is reflected by *Mulieris Dignitatem*: motherhood and virginity. In the light of the Gospel, they acquire their full meaning and value in Mary, who as a *virgin* became the *mother* of God. These two dimensions of the female vocation are united in her in an exceptional manner, in such a way that one do not exclude the other but wonderfully complement it. Usually motherhood is the result of mutual relationship between a man and a woman in the marriage. Mary's motherhood, however, did not come from the matrimonial relationship, but the Holy Spirit did. Hence she maintained her virginity and at the same time became a mother. Virginity and motherhood co-existed in her; they did not mutually exclude each other or did not place limit on each other. On the contrary these dimensions explain and complete each other in the vocation of woman as a person.

As the consequence of mutual relationship in the marriage, motherhood brings about knowledge that means a special "gift of self" from the woman to her husband as an expression of the spousal love whereby the two are united to each other so closely that they become "one flesh". The truth of self giving as an expression of love is achieved in accordance with the truth of the person if that mutual gift of self is not distorted either by the desire of the man to become the "master" of his wife or by the woman remaining closed within her own instincts. Because God created man and woman are equal. The human being – man and woman – is the only being in the world which God will for its own sake. God created man not for dominating woman; but the woman created by him from man's bone is a companion in living as a wife. Then they as a father and a mother transmit the life to new generations. Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person; and this is precisely the woman's part. In this openness, in conceiving and giving birth to a child, the woman discovers herself through a sincere gift of self. The gift of interior readiness to accept the child and bring it into the world is linked to the marriage union, which should constitute a special moment in the mutual self giving both by the man and the woman.

Today one knows that the woman's motherhood is a bio-physiological and psychological process in the period between the baby's conception and birth. Even the scientific analysis fully confirms that the very physical constitution of woman is naturally disposed to motherhood: conception, pregnancy and

giving birth, which is a consequence of the marriage union with the man. At the same time, this also corresponds to the psycho-physical structure of woman. Motherhood as a human reality and phenomenon is fully explained on the basis of the truth about the person. Motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift: *"I have brought a man into being with the help of the Lord"* (Gn. 4:1). On the woman's part, this fact is linked in a special way to a sincere gift of self. If one re-read the Gospel, the self giving as a component of motherhood is showed by Mary when she said, *"let it be to me according to your words"*, that signify the woman's readiness for the gift of self and her readiness to accept a new life.

The motherhood of woman, however, cannot be separated from the fatherhood of man; because both the fatherhood and the motherhood are human parenthood which shared by the man and the woman as a consequence of the marital union. In the *bio-physical* sense, motherhood depends upon the man. In this sense, motherhood seems to be passive: the process of formation of a new life "takes place" in her body. At the same time, motherhood in *its personal-ethical* sense expresses a very important creativity on the part of the woman, upon whom the very humanity of the new human being mainly depends. In this sense the motherhood of woman presents a special call to the man and his fatherhood. It is why the man cannot dominate the woman strictly. On the contrary, the woman as mother and first teacher of the human being (education being the spiritual dimension of parenthood), has a specific precedent over the man.

Again, Mary is ideal exemplar of the woman according the Bible; the motherhood of the woman finds its culmination in the motherhood of the Mother of God: Mary – the virgin of Nazareth. Her word, *"fiat"* - let it be done to me - shows her maternal; through her maternity God begins a new covenant with human being, the eternal and definitive covenant in Christ. Precisely because this covenant is to be fulfilled "in flesh and blood", its beginning is in the Mother. Mary's motherhood, however, is not only determined by *bio-physical* aspect (her pregnancy and giving birth); furthermore by profound listening to the word of God. As the Gospel told when the crowd said to Jesus, *"Blessed is the womb that bore you, and breasts that you sucked!"* Jesus replied, *"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it"* (Lk. 11:27-28). Jesus confirms the meaning of motherhood in reference to the body, but at the same time he indicates an even deeper meaning, which is connected with the order of the spirit. The motherhood of every woman that is understood in the light of the Gospel, is similarly not only of "flesh and blood": it expresses a profound "listening to the word of the living God" and readiness to "safeguard" these words. A dimension of the new Covenant in Christ enters into human parenthood, making it a reality and a task for "new

creature" (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). The history of every human being passes through the threshold of a woman's motherhood; crossing it conditions "the revelation of the children of God (cf. Rom.8:19).

The motherhood is different from virginity, but in Jesus' teaching, both are connected. A Fundamental to this teaching is Jesus' statement in the conversation on the indissolubility of marriage; it explains about the true meaning of virginity. Having heard the answer given to the Pharisees about divorce, the disciples say to him, "*if that is the position with husband and wife, it is better not to marry*" (Mt. 19:10). It seem that they have a mistaken opinion about virginity; they think that "it is better not to marry" can be used for keeping the virginity or purity. Jesus took their mistaken opinion as a starting point for explaining to them on the value of celibacy or not to be married. He told that there are three causes of *eunuchs*: some are *eunuch* because they were born so, or were made so by men, and there are *eunuchs* who have made themselves *eunuchs* for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven (Mt. 19:12). The last, then, is a voluntary celibacy in view of man's eschatological vocation to union with God. Hence, the essence of celibacy or virginity is the consecration of self by means of greater closeness to God. Based on the Gospel, the meaning of virginity was developed and understood as a vocation for woman. Virginity has to be considered also as a path for woman, a path on which they realize their womanhood in a way different from marriage. Jesus also taught the virginity in the spousal context. By choosing virginity freely, women confirm themselves as persons, as beings whom the Creator has willed for their own sake. At the same time they realize the personal value of their own femininity by becoming "sincere gift" for God who has revealed himself in Christ, the Redeemer of humanity and the spouse of souls: a spousal gift. Through the spousal love, woman becomes a gift for man. The naturally spousal predisposition of the feminine personality finds a response in virginity that is understood in this way. Woman responds the vocation to virginity in their womanhood through their total gift of self until the end. Thus they give themselves to the Divine Spouse, and this personal gift tends to union, which is properly spiritual in character. In the consecrated woman's life, for example, who live according to the charisma and the rules of the various apostolic institutes, it can express itself as concern for people, especially the most needy: the sick, the handicapped, the orphan, the elderly, etc. in this way a consecrated woman finds her Spouse.

This is the evangelical ideal of virginity, in which both dignity and vocation of woman are realized in a special way. In virginity, thus, understood the so-called radicalism of the Gospel finds expression: "*leave everything and follow Christ*" (cf. Mt. 19:27). This cannot be compared to remaining simply unmarried or single, because virginity is not restricted to a mere "no", but

contains a profound "yes" in the spousal order: the gift of self for love in a total and undivided manner. Virginity according to the Gospel means renouncing marriage and thus physical motherhood. The virginity, however, does not deprive the woman of her rights; because the renouncing of this physical motherhood, a renouncing that can involve great sacrifice for a woman, makes possible a different kind of motherhood: motherhood "according to the Spirit" (cf. Rom. 8:4), a spiritual motherhood. This virginity is confirmed in the religious communities of apostolic life, and in a different way in communities of contemplative life, or the cloister. But it is established in the secular institutes too. In all of these the same truth about the spiritual motherhood of virgins is confirmed in various ways. Remember, it is not only a matter of communal forms but also of non-communal forms. In brief, the virginity as a woman's vocation is always the vocation of a person – of a unique, individual person. Therefore the spiritual motherhood which makes it felt in this vocation is also profoundly personal.

This is also the basis of a specific convergence between the virginity of unmarried woman and motherhood of married woman. This convergence moves not only from motherhood toward virginity, as emphasized above; it also moves from virginity toward marriage, the form of woman's vocation in which she becomes a mother by giving birth to her children. The starting point of this second analogy is the meaning of marriage. A woman is "married" either through the sacrament of marriage or spiritually through marriage with Christ. In both cases marriage signifies the "sincere gift of the person" of the bride to the groom. In this way, it can be said that the profile of marriage is found spiritually in virginity.

3.4. Man and Woman are Called to Exist Mutually One for the Other

As it has written before, the human being – man and woman – created by God are the creation in his image and likeness. The man is the high point of the whole order of creation in the visible world; the human race, which takes its origin from the calling into existence of man and woman, crowns the whole work of creation. Both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image. From the very beginning the man and the woman constitute a personal communion: union of the two. According to the biblical story of creation, more descriptive and metaphorical, it is explained the essential truth of an action of the man and woman which constitute their living as a communal reality in which they reveal the nature of existence. Man and woman build the communion of mutual love in a reciprocal self of giving. Woman created from man's rib is a companion, a helper, not only in action, to subdue the earth, but mostly in effort for discovering their identity[3]. So that they are created for helping and making complete each other in discovering

and building humanity that manifest conjugality. This indicates that man and woman are equal.

The personal character of human being consist the light of the truth of the image and likeness of God. An interpersonal relation constituted by man and woman brings a "new light" of the fact of the image and likeness of God. Their life reflects the life of Trinity. As it has said in the book of Genesis, man cannot exist "alone"; but he can exist only as a "unity of the two", and therefore in relation to another human person. Being a person in the image and likeness of God thus also involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other "I". This is a prelude to the definitive self-revelation of the Triune God: a living unity in the communion of the father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God, who allows himself to be known by human beings through and in Christ, is the unity of the Trinity: unity in communion. In this way new light is also thrown on man's image and likeness to God. The fact that man and woman created are the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror the communion of love that is in the Triune God who loves each other in the intimate mystery of the one Divine life. In brief, in the unity of the two, man and woman are called from the beginning not only to exist "side by side" or "together", but they are called to exist mutually "one for the other".

The ideal relationship between man and woman, however, is broken by sin. The biblical description in the book of Genesis outlines the truth about the consequences of man's sin, as it is shown by the disturbance of that original relationship between them which corresponds to their individual dignity as persons. Then they cannot fully find themselves except through a sincere gift of self. There is a break and constant threat precisely in regard to this "unity of the two" which corresponds to the dignity of the image and likeness of God in both of them. The woman will be dominated by her desire to her husband and the man will rule over her (cf. Gn 3:16). This "domination" indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality in the unity of the two: and this is especially to the disadvantage of the woman, whereas only the equality resulting from their dignity as person can give to their mutual relationship the character of an authentic "*communio personarum*". When the violation of this equality involves an element to the disadvantage of the woman, at the same time it also diminishes the true dignity of the man. Here what means the man losses image and likeness to God. So that man – the man and the woman – are called to recover their dignity by means of conversion or purification from evil and liberation from sin.

3.5. The Dignity of Woman and the Order of Love

In God's eternal plan, woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root. The order of love belongs to the intimate life of God himself, the life of the Trinity. In the intimate life of God, the Holy Spirit is the personal hypostasis of love. Through the Spirit, Uncreated Gift, love becomes a gift for created persons. The calling of woman into existence at man's side as "a helper fit for him" in the "unity of the two", provide the visible world of creatures with particular conditions so that the love of God may be poured into the heart of the beings created in his image.

Paul describes the relation between Christ and the Church as like as the relationship between the bridegroom and the bride (see Eph. 5: 21-33). This connects the truth about marriage as a primordial sacrament with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. Re-reading the book of Genesis in the light of the spousal symbol in the letter to the Ephesians, one can grasp truth which seems to determines in an essential manner the question of woman's dignity, and subsequently also the question of their vocation: the dignity of woman is measured by the order of love, which is essentially the order of justice and charity. The woman is a person can love and only a person can be loved. When one says that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. But it means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationship which shape society and structure the interaction between all persons.

The woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity. It is likewise connected with the love which she gives in return. Because love is an ontological and ethical requirement of the person; then this affirmation indicates the ethical dimension of a person's vocation. Woman can only find herself by giving love to others. While the dignity of woman witnesses to the love which she receives in order to love in return, the biblical "exemplar" of the woman also seems to reveal the true order of love which constitutes woman's own vocation. Vocation is meant here in its fundamental, and one may say universal significance, a significance which is then actualized and expressed in woman's many different vocations in the Church and the world.

4. Conclusion

The Pope's letter *Mulieris dignitatem* appears as a response to question about vocation and missions of laymen, an active participations and a responsibility of them in the Church's life and mission; especially the question about what can and must woman do for the Church and society. Then, this letter reflects the

dignity and vocation of woman by theological and anthropological perspectives. In the theological perspectives it has four dimensions: Trinity, Christology, Ecclesiology, and Mariology. To enter in the anthropological scope, Pope offered ontological, psychological, ethical, social, and cultural advices for putting in the light of the wealth of the human reality of woman.

Mulieris dignitatem profoundly examines on the dignity and vocation of woman. There are two dimensions of the woman's vocation: *motherhood* and *virginity.* Pope takes Eve and Mary for examining the meaning of *motherhood* and *virginity.* In the reflection on the dignity and vocation of woman, it does not only reflect woman herself, but also see her relationship with the man. Because man and woman created by God in equality as person. Even they are called to exist mutually "one for the other", especially in the marital relationship. Man and woman are called to live in a communion of love; and this way to mirror the communion of love that is in the Triune God who loves each other in the intimate mystery of the one Divine life. Woman's dignity is closely connected with love. She is a person can love and a person can be loved. Woman can only find herself by giving love to others.

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Endnotes

1 Dionigi Tettamanci, *Grandi Cose Ha Fatto in Me L'onnipotente* – meditando con il Papa la *Mulieris dignitatem*, 9.

2 The Pius XII's discourses are Address to Italian Woman (October 21, 1945), Address to the World Union of Catholic Woman's Organizations (April 24, 1952), Address to the participants in the XIV International Meeting of the World Union of Catholic Woman's Organizations (September 29, 1975).

3 Ludmila e S. Grygiel, *La Coniugalita dell'uomo e della Donna è un'epifania della Trinita*, in Dignita e Vocazione della Donna, 105.

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