

The Bride of Christ and the Mystical Stigmata

By Dorothea Ludwig-Wang, 24 June 2022

The vast majority of stigmatics throughout Church history have been women. This particular phenomenon has appeared in women in different states of life, but most cases have been found in those who received the calling to become brides of Christ either as religious or in the world. Notably, the appearance of stigmata often occurs during times of crisis in the Church, with one of the most famous cases being that of St. Catherine of Siena during the Western Schism. While God is free to confer extraordinary graces upon anyone He chooses, the connection between the stigmata and the vocation of virginity in women serves to emphasize certain supernatural realities.

Man and woman are both *essentially* in the image of God, equally possessing the use of reason and free will; but when that image is defined *accidentally*, the two sexes represent different attributes and come together to produce a complete image. A finite being cannot completely represent an infinite Being by himself, and so the unity of opposites is required. A man and a woman together, for example, represent justice and mercy, two attributes which co-exist in God perfectly but are often set in opposition to each other by human beings. In this unity of opposites, the limited human mind comes to a fuller understanding of God, which will only be completed in heaven.

Adam was made first and became the principle from which the human race originated. But because it was not good for him to be alone, God created Eve to complete human nature and cooperate with him in the generation of offspring, so that new human beings may be created to be loved by God and to return His love. She was not created from Adam's head to dominate him, nor from his feet to be his slave, but from his side, so that she may be an equal and complementary partner to him. There is equality and mutual dependence, but also headship: man represents God's authority because Adam was created first, while woman represents His love because Eve was created to minister to his loneliness and enjoy the privilege of bringing forth new life.

The creation of Eve from Adam's rib foreshadows the pouring forth of the Church from Christ's pierced side on the Cross. Thus, in marriage, there is a very real image of the wedding between Christ and His Church, of His sacrificial love for Her and Her loving submission to Him. The sacraments, which are outward signs of inward grace instituted for the salvation of souls, show that Christ desires to be present among His people already, even as they are still on their earthly pilgrimage, albeit under veiled forms. He hides Himself in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine, His eternal priesthood in human ministers, and His wedding with the Church in a marriage between a man and a woman.

The difference between Christ's presence in heaven in His full glory and His sacramental presence in the Eucharist is analogous to the difference between virginity and marriage. In marriage, the husband and wife make present the relationship between Christ and the Church, but this union is hidden under an image—the full reality exists only in virginity dedicated to God. In the Resurrection, men and women will no longer marry, as there will no longer be a need for this holy sign once the full reality has been unveiled. And so a woman's virginity dedicated to God is

not a sacrament: the sacraments are the *means*, while the spousal relationship with Christ, which all souls in heaven will enjoy, is the *end* for which they were instituted.

The Church teaches that virginity and celibacy are objectively higher states than marriage: the reason for this is not only because an unmarried person has more time to devote to apostolic works, but because he is already living in a heavenly state. A woman's virginity is more highly privileged than a man's because she alone can become Christ's spouse on earth and a perfect image of the Church, inferior only to Our Lady, the most perfect creature. Because there is no salvation outside the Church, all the souls who have been saved through Her will live forever as brides of Christ in the eternal wedding feast in heaven. A virgin spouse on earth is such a bride already, which is why human souls, even those of males, are called "she" in many spiritual texts.

In the midst of the feminists' complaints about men holding all the power in the Church due to their superordination in authority, a key point is overlooked: authority in the Christian sense does not conform to the secular world's idea of domination and tyranny, but rather embraces humility and servitude. Those who exercise authority in the Church, who Herself is feminine, ought to be male, but priestly authority is essentially sacrificial because it is Eucharistic. The Eucharist is the Body of Christ, as is the Church His Bride—and so is the virgin, Her image. Masculine authority finds itself at the service of feminine love, and likewise, the sacrifice of the altar according to the Church's venerable rites sustains the sacrificial life of virgins. No vocations would have any meaning without this mutual dependence united by charity.

In marriage and family life, the man is the head while the woman is the heart, and the same applies to the Church. The head enjoys the primacy of authority, but he and the heart are also mutually dependent upon each other. If the heart ceases pumping blood to the head and the other organs, then the body will die. And if the head abdicates his authority and ceases to lead the rest of the body, then it falls to the heart to burn with love even more and thereby correct him. No woman has ever been or ever will be a priest, but women, the heart of the Church, have the right to correct even the supreme head of the Church if necessary, as St. Catherine of Siena—a virgin saint and stigmatic—did to Pope Gregory XI during the Western Schism.

When one part of the body suffers, the others suffer with it; the most severe is when the head neglects its responsibilities, causing disorder throughout the entire body. When this occurs, the Church is in need of renewal, which can only be brought about through the shedding of blood. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, but when the persecution is internal, rather than external, then it is the stigmatics who join the ranks of the martyrs as victim souls. It is very fitting that such a stigmatic be a virgin, embracing the spirituality of the virgin-martyrs of the early Church, as she is the heart of the Church; she bears in her own body Christ's physical sufferings in union with the sufferings of His Mystical Body.

Through suffering, a virgin comes to represent the Church as a spiritual mother, giving birth to spiritual children, and she plays an important role in the salvation of souls. As the vessel through which other souls are sanctified, she indicates that a period of mercy is at hand, during which people have a chance to repent of their sins and be reconciled with God and His Church.