

5. Fatherhood, Reproductive Justice, and the Strategic Invisibility of Men

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The story of the “woman caught in adultery” in John 7:53–8:11 famously leaves out any details about the man involved in the adultery. As the story begins, the woman alone is accused. Even as she is “forgiven” by Jesus, the man accused of sharing his bed with her receives no public shaming and no scrutiny from generations of Christians who have retold and interpreted this story. Perhaps for many women who have heard this story proclaimed from the pulpit, what resonates most with their lived experiences is the fact that women continue to be shamed while their sexual partners flee from any responsibility from their actions. To hear such a story preached as “The Gospel of the Lord” may indeed be triggering for survivors of relationship violence.¹

Today, we clothe this absence and the exoneration of men differently, but they remain intact in the stories of heterosexual experiences of sexual activities. There are double standards between men and women that exonerate men because of their invisibility. Every time a person asks what she was wearing, what kind of personality she had, or how she was behaving, the focus of the offense—whether it is neglect, harassment, assault, or abuse—shifts from the perpetrator to the victim. Men can, and often do, simply walk away from it all. Society does not ask the same questions to, does not demand the same scrutiny of, or place the same

¹ This chapter does come with a trigger warning. It has subjects dealing with abuse, abortion, pregnancy, adoption, and irresponsible, neglectful, and abusive behaviors of fathers, boyfriends, and/or men. If you are experiencing relationship violence, you do not have to suffer alone. In the United States, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is a 24/7 service that provides callers with confidential support. Call 1-800-799-7233, Text START to 88788, or visit thehotline.org.

blame on men. Because men have often bought into these double standards, these norms go unchecked for them. By exonerating men from culpability, men often occupy and enjoy the center stage of society without the burden of accountability.² This reality is not limited to sexual and gender violence but extends more broadly to many facets of life in general, including issues concerning reproductive justice.

Reproductive justice (RJ) encompasses many overlapping components related to reproduction: medical and legal ethics, theological teachings and beliefs, personal values and principles, family upbringing and cultural norms and expectations, bodily and biological integrity, socio-global setting and situational challenges, and laws and policies, to name a few. The questions that often arise through discussion of these wide-ranging issues concern the status and viability of the fetus, whether one has the right *not* to have a child, and/or what happens when one is forced to carry an unwanted, ill-timed, or dangerous pregnancy to term. What is missing in that conversation, however, is the responsibility of men in those pregnancies.

Thus, I aim to decenter men from infiltrating the realms of women's bodies, experiences, and agencies and, in turn, insert men back in their own realms to take responsibility in ways most appropriate to their roles. My method is to help men imagine and acknowledge their role in RJ so that men may discern in charity and compassion rather than simply casting judgment or blame on women.

Nonetheless, this aim requires caution because it is to "talk about men" yet again. After all, men often dominate and occupy the center of our *histories*, rendering women's presence and experiences invisible and peripheral. Placing men back in these stories related to RJ, however, makes visible the strategic invisibility that conveniently hides men's decisions,

² See Kathryn Lilla Cox's analysis of the story of "Miriam" in her essay within the present volume, "Reproductive Injustice as Social Sin: Mapping Sin Discourse into Debates about Fertility Decisions."

actions, and accountability.³ Doing so also restores the agency of women to its rightful owner.

Admittedly, it is difficult to motivate men to unlearn and undo these incoherent and inconsistent standards, much less inspire them to encourage one another for social transformation. This unwillingness to behave differently often comes down to the failure of moral imagination. In *Moral Discernment*, Richard M. Gula S.S. finds that people “can’t act any differently because they can’t imagine what it would be like to be someone else.”⁴ When we decide to act or not act, it is “not as much motivated by our fundamental convictions and reasons as it is by our imagination” and “our reasons will be convincing only if they are consistent with the world of images [that] we are using to interpret our experiences.”⁵ Such images and imagination shape and clarify what we see and envision as possible.⁶

It is suitable, therefore, to use an exercise of imagination to help men see the current reality and to urge them towards personal and social transformation. Such an exercise exposes the double standards and the lack of coherence and consistency surrounding the issue of reproduction, all of which contribute to restore moral agency back to women.⁷

³ Here, I am using a liberative literary strategy, perhaps like the approach used by the author of the Gospel of John, to evoke a certain reaction in the readers to make a point. See Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008); Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz, “Border-Crossing and its Redemptive Power in John 7:53–8:11: A Cultural Reading of Jesus and the Accused,” in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-Viewed*, ed. Ingrid R. Kitzberger (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000).

⁴ Richard M. Gula S.S., *Moral Discernment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 97.

⁵ Gula, *Moral Discernment*, 94.

⁶ Gula, *Moral Discernment*, 95.

⁷ Cathleen Kaveny finds this lack of coherence manifested as too narrowly focused almost exclusively on outcome in the discipline of moral theology. Simplistic questions like “Do you or do you not defend magisterial teaching?” suggest that complex Catholic tradition “can be reduced to a multiple-choice test.” Because of the complexity of Catholic (moral) tradition, moral theology must also be multidimensional. Cathleen Kaveny, *Ethics at the Edges of Law Christian Moralists and American Legal Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 30–31.

This chapter moves in four parts to achieve this aim. First, it sets up the conversation by placing the RJ movement in its proper historical and current context with its intent, definition, and meaning. Then, it moves into the Catholic realm and places RJ in a context that is already fundamentally essentialist,⁸ uneven, and sexist. Despite this contextual limitation, however, the concern about a society without fathers and the required discernment that Pope Francis uplifts in *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) can be key aspects of the moral life for a “genuine reciprocity” in relationships. Thirdly, while Pope Francis’s call is an effort to put men back into the story for a true and genuine reciprocity, it does not do enough to imagine a world in which men experience the kinds of scrutiny that women endure. Thus, this chapter introduces an exercise of imagination, employing a visceral method and a tongue-in-cheek provocation by making similar demands on men as those faced by women. It is meant to evoke distress caused by the sheer absurdity of these demands, so readers recognize that if the demands are unreasonable for men, then they are certainly unreasonable for women, too. The purpose of this exercise is not to demonize men. Rather, it is to build empathy, which in the context of “contact hypothesis” (a concept I address later) may behoove men to take appropriate responsibilities. Such a method reveals the double standards in how society thinks about human bodies and bodily integrity. Finally, identifying the double standards exposes the simplistic nature of our policies, laws, and teachings and leads to the recognition of the complex and intersectional implications for RJ. Thus, the chapter concludes that the response from RJ perspective must not only be personal and on the level of social and personal support but also address its relations to global male dominance and white supremacy.

⁸ For a definition of gender essentialism in theology, see Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 20: “In theological discussions of gender, essentialism is the doctrine that God created humanity in two distinct sexes. Each is made for the other. Our created nature is to be either male or female. Our nature cannot change. Our desires are intended to be for the opposite sex. Same-sex desire cannot conform to our created nature.”

What I suggest is that the most adequate solution must include continued conversations about the systemic, structural, ecclesial, intersectional, and global variables and determinants that play important roles in the conversation about RJ. However, I maintain that none of that can occur adequately without enfranchised women's presence, voices, and experiences at the table of conversation about RJ. All of this, however, must begin by men taking responsibilities for their actions.

Restoring Men into the History of RJ

As mentioned throughout this volume, the term Reproductive Justice—coined by twelve Black women in 1994 at a conference in Chicago—“is a political movement that splices reproductive rights with social justice to achieve reproductive justice,” which at its heart claims that, “all fertile persons and persons who reproduce and become parents require a safe and dignified context for these most fundamental human experiences.”⁹ Right away, RJ, properly understood, is not a simple and divisive conversation about being Pro-choice or Pro-life and moves beyond them to the broader context as it relates to human dignity. Thus, the twelve Black women activists and scholars were suspicious of any movements that gave “the primacy of abortion, but not its necessity.” They viewed this issue from an intersectional lens that “made the case that while abortion was a crucial resource for [them], [they] also needed health care, education, jobs, day care, and the right to motherhood.”¹⁰ Thus, it has “three primary values, 1) the right *not* to have a child; 2) the right to *have* a child; and 3) the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments.”¹¹

What is historically missing, however, is the role of men and the lack thereof in these movements/frameworks. To uphold these values of RJ,

⁹ Loretta Ross, and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2017), 9, 63. For a further discussion on these three primary values, see Kate Ward's chapter in this volume.

¹⁰ Ross and Solinger, *Reproductive Justice*, 64.

¹¹ Ross and Solinger, *Reproductive Justice*, 65.

the discussion of men is essential first because sperm vitality is important in considering fertility. Thus, considering all fertile persons and persons who reproduce must include men. Second, men are a necessary part of the equation in addressing the context of the intersecting social elements—including health care, education, jobs, day care, and the right to motherhood and singlehood—that makes real choices possible. Relatedly, one cannot adequately discuss social needs in a context that is disproportionate for people of color and transgender folks without considering men and their roles. Thus, while mindful of the different aspects of these inferences, men's vantage point is my focus of this chapter because it is sometimes a missing link in the existing conversation about RJ.

Using a method rooted in the Catholic understanding of mutual responsibility, which I discuss in the next section, rather than an approach rooted in retrieval of patriarchal gender relations,¹² one can begin to underscore this inextricable link. In the three primary values outlined by the RJ movement, one can apply men's roles in them, both in terms of accountability and support. That is, to take responsibility for the right of a woman *not* to have a child, men must be equally responsible and present and contribute to what is required when she decides not to have the child. To take responsibility for the right of a woman to *have* a child, men must be present in supporting prenatal care, childbirth expenses, parental care, the raising of a child, and so on. To take responsibility for the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments, men must contribute to providing and sustaining such environments, to the extent that they are able, and fight for social structures and systems that enable the condition for the possibility of such parenting alongside women. Suffice it to say that in the context of the history of the reproductive justice movement, RJ conversations should include men. That is not to say, however, that men

¹² See Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 16–21; see also “Male Supremacy,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy.

should dominate pregnancy discernments. The concept of “reciprocity” helps bringing men into the discussion without having them dominate the discussion.

Catholic “Genuine Reciprocity” for Men and Reproductive Justice

AL offers a different vision of reciprocity, which subverts that gendered power dynamic, not by completely turning it on its head but at least starting an *initial step* towards an egalitarian approach with respect to RJ. Francis claims that “a rigid approach turns into an over-accentuation of the masculine or feminine and does not help children and young people to appreciate the genuine reciprocity incarnate in the real conditions of matrimony” (AL, no. 286). This flexibility enables men to do their part towards the “genuine reciprocity” and feel connected by the bond created by the sexual relationship well beyond the physical act of sexual activity. It opens possibilities for men to imagine in reciprocal, connected, and responsible ways to think about the (sexual) relationship generally and as it pertains to RJ more particularly.

This reciprocal imagination is important because most men—and more particularly cisgender men in heterosexual (married) relationships—find it difficult to navigate through the issue of RJ while often feeling awkward and lost when talking or thinking about it. Part of this unease is understandable as the issues involve women’s bodies and experience, of which cisgender men have no direct experience. However, another important reason may be the fact that men feel removed from the issue given the physicalist mindset rooted in a long-standing dualistic tradition of the Western philosophy and culture. In other words, once men are “done” with the physical sexual activity, he can “walk away” from the interconnected and multiple responsibilities of that act and treat it as if it is an isolated physical incident. Moreover, the dualistic categorization is related, if not directly, to heteronormative and (toxic white) masculine

maintenance of power. Reciprocal imagination, then, helps men not only to realize the inextricable link beyond the physical but also to combat against unjust maintenance of power.

Regardless, this reciprocal imagination hinges on what reciprocity is. Francis did not really present an understanding of reciprocity nor did he clearly define what genuine reciprocity means. He did, however, claim that one cannot achieve it through “a rigid approach” or “an over-accentuation of the masculine and feminine.” In *Mutuality: A Formal Norm for Christian Ethics*, Catholic ethicist Dawn M. Nothwehr notes that “in a relationship characterized by reciprocity, there are clearly defined boundaries between parties involved, and any action, influence, giving/receiving is conditioned by the expectation by the other party(ies) that what is received is of equal value to what is given.”¹³ Relatedly, in *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, Catholic ethicist Margaret A. Farley claims that human sexuality, which is fundamentally relational, requires “double reciprocal incarnation” in the context of sexual activity and desire, and seeks mutuality of desire and embodied union.¹⁴ One can apply reciprocity, double reciprocity, and mutuality for men in these ways and fulfill the expectation of giving justifiable and appropriate due consideration

¹³ Ultimately, Nothwehr rightly supposes mutuality as a better term/concept than reciprocity since in mutuality “boundaries are distinct, but the critical difference is that they are determined *with* the other(s) and thus, they are more flexible and fluid.” Between cis-gender persons, it means “sharing of ‘power-with’ by and among women and men in a way that recognizes the full participation of each in the *imago Dei*, embodied in daily life and through egalitarian relationships.” Dawn M. Nothwehr, *Mutuality: A Formal Norm for Christian Ethics* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), 4–5, 233.

¹⁴ Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 220–222. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1966). Like Nothwehr, Farley also uses the notion of mutuality as a preferred term.

for men not only for mutual respect but also for men's accountability to women.¹⁵

How would a reciprocal approach evaluate Francis's concern about "a society without fathers" (AL, no. 176)? One would immediately recognize that fathers are missing from the conversation even though it "takes two to tango" and fathers are only inserted into the conversation to tell women what they can or cannot do. Imagine what would happen if fathers were not only recognized as mutual and loving interlocutors of their partners but also put through the same kind of scrutiny that women experience (without adequate social support). How might such an exercise help men to empathize through imagination and learning and caring about other vulnerable populations that are more likely to be denied a full range of social services and protections necessary for RJ, namely BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, and young people.

In other words, while acknowledging the existence of the deep-rooted physicalism and essentialism in AL, one can still build upon Francis's teaching, as it opens the vision of genuine reciprocity towards achieving RJ. In this way, AL is a development and an advancement from the more rigid physicalism and essentialism present in previous papal teachings. Within such a framework, one can begin to address the concern about a society without fathers by placing men back in the conversation about RJ. In this sense, then, (Catholic) men may play a crucial role in the discussion of RJ.

Empathy through Contact Hypothesis

To invite and convince men to join the difficult conversation of RJ and to learn from women about their experiences and bodies from women's vantage points, I propose that we take the approach of "contact

¹⁵ It is important to note that while the issue of gender complementarity is lurking in the background of all of this, Nothwehr and Farley's notions of reciprocity and mutuality are markedly different from it.

hypothesis,” according to which, intergroup contact or interaction under appropriate conditions can reduce prejudice between members especially if one recognizes the common humanity as an “in-group.”¹⁶ Through this approach, men may be more open to conversation and quicker to respond when the issues are perceived as *their* issues. For instance, the problem of impotence has been quickly resolved not only with the accidental invention but, more importantly, the wide distributions of Viagra (Sildenafil).¹⁷ The aim of this exercise, then, is to help men treat the issue of RJ in a socially just and urgent manner by imagining it as experienced by men in their bodies, so they can empathize with women’s experiences and perspectives. In other words, men can learn from and center women’s experiences by imagining “being in their shoes.” Centering women’s experience in this way can be transformative.¹⁸

But how? My suggestion is for men to imagine going through the similar kind of scrutiny through which women experience the world. Authors in this volume point to various kinds of scrutiny that women face—whether because of economic constraints (Ward), cultural practices (Saldanha and Ehidiamhen), educational policies (Cox), institutional racism (Roche), immigration laws (Peterson-Iyer), or hospital regulations (Reimer-Barry). Many women around the world are forced to acquiesce to (patriarchal) laws and moral regulations. Often these policies and regulations require pregnant people to carry-to-term, simplistically

¹⁶ See Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice: 25th Anniversary Edition*, 2nd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1980), especially chapter 3. Taschler and West found that such interactions could be a potential tool to combat sexism, rape myth acceptance, intentions to rape in men, and sexualization of rape by women. Miriam Taschler and Keon West, “Contact with Counter-Stereotypical Women Predicts Less Sexism, Less Rape Myth Acceptance, Less Intention to Rape (in Men) and Less Projected Enjoyment of Rape (in Women),” *Sex Roles* 76, no. 7 (2017): 473–484, doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0679-x.

¹⁷ Abi Berger, “The Rise and Fall of Viagra,” *British Medical Journal* 317, no. 7161 (1998): 824, doi.org/10.1136/bmj.317.7161.824.

¹⁸ For instance, it could allow our culture, which teaches girls to wait for boys to grow up, to teach boys to learn from girls because girls mature faster. My challenge is simply that men learn from women about women’s experience and women’s bodies from women’s vantage points.

expecting them to place the baby for adoption if they do not have the means to raise the baby, or force abortion without their consent. In the cases of pregnancy complications and/or fetal genetic anomalies, some laws force women to wait until the life of the mother is in danger to perform a procedure that would address the pregnancy complications. The reason for this delay is either so that this “proof requirement” confirms no “attack” on the “viable fetus” or that it is considered a permissible “indirect abortion” via the principle of double effect.¹⁹ Even after the abortion (and presumably in early pregnancy losses), laws can potentially require the hospitals and mothers to bury or cremate the fetal remains, as it is deemed to be a human death.²⁰ Meanwhile, men disappear from the original stories and only appear as enforcers of these regulations, policies, rules, and theologies.²¹

What if men can imagine, as they should, these issues as “their issues” and share appropriate responsibility? What would happen if men, and their bodies, had to go through such anguish, enforcement, and torment because of an external control over their bodies and agency? Would it not highlight the complexity and the absurdities? If men are appalled, would it not help them see and be outraged by the preposterous demands on women, too? Thus, while the following exercise of imagination will or should feel outlandish, such a response is the point of it. One ought to feel indignation and imagine what women experience in real life.

Imagine, then, applying similar kinds of conditions and external control to men and their bodies. Take, for instance, the possible scenario of coerced male sterilization to minimize unwanted pregnancies and babies. If unwanted pregnancy is a social problem and if it takes two people’s genetic material for pregnancy to be achieved, then preventing

¹⁹ David Kelly, Gerard Magill, and Henk ten Have, eds., *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 104–121.

²⁰ Brandon Smith, “Legal Battle over Indiana Fetal Remains Law Over as U.S. Supreme Court Declines Appeal,” *WFYI* PBS-NPR affiliate in Indianapolis, May 1, 2023, www.wfyi.org/news/articles/legal-battle-over-indiana-fetal-remains-law-over-as-us-supreme-court-declines-appeal.

²¹ Michelle Goodwin, *Policing the Womb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

unwanted pregnancy could warrant mandatory vasectomies for men. Such a policy would require men/boys to have a vasectomy and only reverse the procedure when they are ready to be responsible.²² What about the physical, emotional, mental toll of a vasectomy? There are some possibilities for complications from the outpatient surgical procedure that can cause this strain. Stress may also result from the law requiring vasectomy because it would not need to attend to the patient's informed consent but merely to the application of the law in the patient's life. Men would simply have to withstand them in similar manner that woman had to endure in cases of uncertain fetal viability.

Moreover, how would one determine whether they are ready to be responsible? One would have to prove it. Such a "proof requirement" would force men to demonstrate that they have financial means to support a child, mental stability, and maturity to parent, and familial or communal support (both physical and emotional) necessary to bring a child into the world responsibly.²³ While this is quite a narrow opening for bringing a child into the world, rules based on women's biological cycle, with

²² Yelena Dzhanova, "An Oklahoma State Rep Proposed Legislation that Would Mandate Young Men Get Mandatory Vasectomies," *Business Insider*, May 21, 2022, www.businessinsider.com/oklahoma-state-rep-proposed-legislation-mandating-vasectomies-for-men-2022-5. Similar, tongue-in-cheek arguments were made for requiring vasectomy at age fifty or after three children. Of course, the US Supreme Court ruled that forced sterilization is unconstitutional, "but during the 20th century, the federal government funded coerced sterilization of people of color, disabled people and poor people in 32 states, PBS reported." Kristin Lam, "Mandatory Vasectomy at Age 50? Alabama Lawmaker Proposes Response to Abortion Ban," *USA Today*, February 18, 2020, www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/02/17/mandatory-vasectomy-alabama-proposal/4791335002; See also Emily Reimer-Barry's discussion of Dorothy Roberts' report about forced sterilization of Black men in Indiana in 1902. Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 66–68.

²³ These requirements often do not have the desired effect. Cf. Ximena Bustillo, "Congress Created Changes to Food Assistance. Here's What They Mean" *NPR*, June 2, 2023, www.npr.org/2023/06/02/1179633624/snap-food-assistance-work-requirements-congress-debt-ceiling.

additional external consideration of married life, limit such an opportunity in similar ways.

However, Catholic persons might object on the grounds of artificiality. That is, one might argue that vasectomy is not natural continence, unlike NFP or the rhythm method. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* claims that part of parental responsibility “concerns the regulation of procreation” (no. 2368) that can be achieved by “periodic continence . . . based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods” (no. 2370). To be faithful to these teachings on “naturalness” and if applied just as strictly to men, such continence and regulation could not only be based on women’s biological cycle but also based on men. Why would such continence not manifest in terms of limiting the number of times men can engage in sexual activity per month or only certain days of the week? It is within the means of what is often considered “natural” or not artificial and the forced control over men’s bodies is consistent with the restrictions on women.

Moreover, since there are restrictive measures accessing mifepristone and misoprostol, which were widely available for women who sought to terminate a pregnancy, why not restrict men from getting and using Viagra (sildenafil) to further safeguard and get to the core of the “problem” by limiting it until men go through a “proof requirement” of responsibility? After all, mifepristone use is a lot less risky (one death per every one million usage) than Viagra (forty-nine deaths per every million usages).²⁴ Furthermore, if we are serious about men’s responsibility for pregnancy, what is

²⁴ Mike Mitka, “Some Men Who Take Viagra Die—Why?” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 283, no. 5 (2000): 590–593, doi.org/10.1001/jama.283.5.590-JMN0202-2-1; Analysis of Medication Abortion Risk and the FDA report “Mifepristone US Post-Marketing Adverse Events Summary through 6/30/2021,” *Advancing Standards in Reproductive Health* Issue Brief, November 2022. Note that according to FDA, these events not only “cannot with certainty be causally attributed to mifepristone,” but also the latest update through June 2022 shows even less risk for Mifepristone (www.fda.gov/media/164331/download); See Annette Choi and Will Mullery, “How safe is the abortion pill compared with other common drugs?” *CNN Health*, April 21, 2023, www.cnn.com/2023/03/15/health/abortion-pill-safety-dg/index.html.

stopping these regulations from going so far as to require the biological father to pay half of the cost related to the mother and the (actual and potential) child after the sexual encounter, no matter what their relationship status is?²⁵ According to one opinion, such support includes “medical costs, living costs, education—all the costs a father normally assumes for his child. In addition, the child should have a full share of the father’s estate when the father dies. If women cannot decide whether to carry a child, fathers should not be able to decide whether... to support the woman and the child.”

²⁶ At the very least, financial support should be required regardless of the outcome. And how would we know who the father is? One can use “DNA as a verification,” to establish “paternity for every embryo.” In this way, men can assume “responsibility for the consequences of their pleasure.”²⁷

To be sure, these are not just hyperbolic sardonicism. There are legal and existential implications. If men are rightly linked to every heterosexual sexual activity then they would also be implicated in laws that punish women for the violations concerning pregnancy and terminations. Instead of convicting only women of “murder” for carrying out abortion in the states where abortion is illegal, the legislation would concurrently introduce a bill that can implicate men as the accomplices or conspirators of that “crime.” The only mention of the “husband” that I can find in these bills is in terms of not exonerating women with “presumption that a woman is subject to compulsion when acting in the presence of her

²⁵ For example, the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City supports such measure in Utah, calling it a “positive pro-life measure to help women who want to keep their baby but feel overwhelmed by the costs.” Rachel Treisman, “Utah Law Requires Biological Fathers to Pay Half of Pregnancy-Related Medical Costs,” *NPR*, April 7, 2021, www.npr.org/2021/04/07/985089967/utah-law-requires-biological-fathers-to-pay-half-of-pregnancy-related-medical-co. Notably, there is a concern that “the bill could tie women financially to an abusive partner,” although its supporters are confident that the law would “not open doors for anything that could put a survivor of domestic violence in any fear.”

²⁶ Robert Veitch, “Readers Write: Abortion: Women Deserve Better,” *Star Tribune*, May 3, 2022, www.startribune.com/readers-write-abortion/600170244.

²⁷ Veitch, “Readers Write: Abortion: Women Deserve Better.”

husband.” Thus, even though one of these bills in question is called “equal protection act,” referring to the Fourteenth Amendment, there is not the same equality in prosecuting all responsible parties, most certainly including men.²⁸

If there are men who decide to stay unmarried—which through the eyes of the Church is not fulfilling their natural duties unless it is for religious reasons—could the Church demand that they become adoptive parents? It would not only fulfill their natural duty and inclination towards fatherhood and contribute to finding homes for “unwanted” babies but also it would deter men from staying single for “selfish” reasons and would allow them to be more “totally giving” of themselves.

All these regulations and expectations are consistent with the typical regulatory ethos men advance and force upon women. Here, what makes the difference is that such an attitude is applied also to men. If these suggestions seem far-fetched or even absurd then they serve the aim of this exercise. While it in no way replaces women’s experiences or grasps the anxiety, toll, and even fear of dying during pregnancy, labor, delivery, and postpartum complications, it does give men a visceral perception, a state of mind, if only vicariously and temporarily, of what it is like when external entities regulate their bodies, decisions, agencies, and bodily integrity. They are not unreasonable scenarios both because men are involved in *all* unwanted pregnancies and because these expectations are already normatively applied to women. If coerced sterilization, forced adoption, disregard of informed consent, applying the law without due consideration for the human aspect of the problem, proof requirement or establishing paternity for every embryo through DNA verification (justified in the name of making the world safer for babies) are all too excessive for men, then they are excessive for women, too.

²⁸ Logan Sparkman, Brian Lawson, and Jess Grotjahn, “New Alabama Bill Wants Abortion to Carry Murder Charge,” CBS 42, May 11, 2023, www.cbs42.com/alabama-news/new-alabama-bill-wants-abortion-to-carry-murder-charge/amp.

Towards Genuine Reciprocity

If indeed there are double-standards and discrepancies in how societies evaluate and apply rules, regulations, laws, and practices concerning our bodies then one can apply the notion of genuine reciprocity both to highlight such inconsistencies and to suggest more consistent evaluations and applications. Such work has been done in the past, but it often does not explicitly name men in that reciprocity. Genuine reciprocity would require such explicit naming and the development of a more just paradigm. However, all of that would require a short but important digression on bodily integrity because it will underscore and name the discrepancy and highlight the need for empathy and reciprocity.

In other words, if male readers are understandably opposed to coerced sterilization, for example, on what moral grounds do they assert the necessity of their bodily autonomy and the necessity of their informed consent? Might those principles be relevant to women discerning whether they can continue to provide bodily life support for a prenatal life or not? Drawing on the resources of Catholic feminist theology could provide a compelling rationale for why readers should justifiably reject men's forced sterilization and—to avoid double standards—why one would need to extend the argument to women's discernments as well.

In comparing organ donation and abortion, Catholic ethicist Patricia Beattie Jung asserts that the human body, unlike other possessions, is an embodied reality and, as such, bodily integrity must be a condition necessary for agency.²⁹ That is, while beneficence may require agents to give or share possessions as gifts that contribute to overall benefit and human flourishing, "it can never require of agents so pure and personal a gift as the gift of one's body" because "the more personal the gift, the more 'gift-y' and discretionary it becomes." After all, what type of gift is more

²⁹ Patricia Beattie Jung, "Abortion and Organ Donation: Christian Reflections on Bodily Life Support," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16, no. 2 (1988): 286.

personal and intimate than the gift of one's bodily self?³⁰ As such, even as Christian love (self-giving agape) preaches selflessness in response to the needs of the human community, bodily forms of giving (e.g., bodily life support) are "highly discretionary gifts, and ought only be encouraged" for the sake of the other and human community and not required or forced.

Thus, organ donation and transplantation, against which Catholic medical ethics once argued using a restricted individualistic interpretation of the principle of totality, are now morally permissible in Catholicism using a broader understanding of the "body" as the human community within the same principle. By a broader understanding of the body, Bert Cunningham means "the mystical body of Christ" which "might serve as the basis for a wider interpretation of 'totality.'" The totality would be corporate and not individual and hence organ transplantation would be licit.³¹ However, David F. Kelly is careful and clear not to impinge on the respect for the individual person and their agency and claims that "we need to guard against it precisely by using individualism and corporatism as correctives to each other's excesses."³² And there are many other complex problems of administering the process and the procedures of organ donation and transplantation.³³ Those procedural problems notwithstanding, a similar kind of step can be taken in terms of abortion and bodily integrity if we understand the body as the Mystical Body of Christ, as long

³⁰ Jung, "Abortion and Organ Donation: Christian Reflections on Bodily Life Support," 287, 289.

³¹ Kelly, Magill, and ten Have, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics*, 37; Bert Joseph Cunningham, *The Morality of Organic Transplantation* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1944).

³² Kelly, Magill, and ten Have, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics*. See Kelly's original argument in his "Individualism and Corporatism in a Personalist Ethics: An Analysis of Organ Transplants," in *Personalist Morals: Essays in Honor of Professor Louis Janssens*, ed. Joseph A. Selling (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988).

³³ For example, Senator Elizabeth Warren, among others, is highly critical of the agency that monopolizes and mishandles many organ transplantation and transportation procedures. Blake Farmer, "Transplant agency is criticized for donor organs arriving late, damaged or diseased" *NPR*, August 17, 2022, www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/08/17/1118009567/damaged-and-diseased-organs-the-agency-overseeing-transplants-faces-intense-scrutiny.

as we are always cognizant of the similar danger of the excesses of individualism and corporatism.

However, while Christian ethicists agree that no one ought to “be forced to donate an organ or submit to other invasive physical procedures for however good cause,” some pro-life feminists disagree and claim that this principle cannot be extended to childbearing and abortion. Catholic ethicist Sidney Callahan, for example, says that in the case of pregnancy, “this right to bodily integrity does not apply” because “one’s own body no longer exists as a single unit but is engendering another organism’s life” when pregnant.³⁴ Catholic ethicist Lisa Sowle Cahill described childbearing as “a *prima facie* duty or obligation mandated by the natural requirements of justice.”³⁵

These disagreements may be irreconcilable. Firstly, even when there is a *prima facie* duty to bear a child, the principle is only binding if it does not come in conflict with another moral principle, in which case one must choose between the two. For that reason, sometimes *prima facie* duty is referred to as “conditional duty.”³⁶ In the case of childbearing, the health, well-being, and the life of the mother may come in conflict with, and therefore may override, the original obligation.³⁷ Secondly, there are fundamental differences in their vision and understanding of life in the womb and outside of the womb. The pro-life Catholic feminists regard the fetus as a person, which makes it a fundamentally different case than organ

³⁴ Jung, “Abortion and Organ Donation,” 287.

³⁵ Jung, “Abortion and Organ Donation,” 280.

³⁶ See W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 19: “I suggest ‘*prima facie* duty’ or ‘conditional duty’ as a brief way of referring to the characteristics (quite distinct from that of being a duty proper) which an act has, in virtue of being of a certain kind (e.g. the keeping of promise), of being an act which would be a duty proper if it were not at the same time of another kind which is morally significant.”

³⁷ Margaret Farley makes similar arguments about the release of obligations. “When another obligation comes into conflict with and supersedes the obligation to keep a commitment, a just love may require that the commitment be broken or changed.” See Margaret A. Farley, *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing* Revised Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 92–100, 126–136.

donations, as removing it before viability would threaten the life of the fetus. Organ donation is different, they would argue, because while not requiring organ donation may lower the chance of survival for the needy patient, the potential donor is not directly and immediately implicated in the survival and death of the patient *and* because they might come across other willing and able donors elsewhere.

Jung, however, sees the similarity between childbearing and organ donation since both protect another person's life. So, while recognizing and agreeing that childbearing is an "other-regarding activity and that this other can be intelligibly regarded as a person, whose very life is dependent upon maternal bodily support," the "good cause" in organ donation is also "the preservation of another person's life."³⁸ In other words, they may share the same *finis operantis* of preserving another person's life, but the pro-life feminists differ on the *finis operis*, as the *act* of removing the fetus itself is deemed immoral.³⁹ Jung would still claim that there is a common end sought in removing the fetus and in organ donation, namely preservation of another person's life and that life outside the womb is just as sacred as life inside it.

Notwithstanding the differences, and while they may differ on their evaluation of the women's bodily integrity, what remains in common is that men have a choice about what they want or do not want to do with their bodies and pregnant women often do not. Men (and non-pregnant women) might have a choice to give bodily life support by the virtue of tissue or blood type in organ donations.⁴⁰ Pregnant women providing bodily life support for the fetus, on the other hand, do not have choice in the same way, irrespective of the condition leading to and during

³⁸ Jung, "Abortion and Organ Donation," 287.

³⁹ However, as Ward reminds us in this volume, violating bodily integrity can also be an intrinsic evil. See Kathleen Bonnette, "Holding the Tensions: Female Bodily Integrity as an Intrinsic Good," *Journal of Moral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2023): 114, doi.org/10.55476/001c.66245. Then, there can be a competing *finis operis* that comes in conflict, in which case either one can override the prior obligation, or one faces a truly impossible choice like *Sophie's Choice*.

⁴⁰ Jung, "Abortion and Organ Donation," 273.

pregnancy. In other words, whether it is the case of mutual sexual encounter, incest, rape, or complications in pregnancies, women can be involuntarily bound, unlike men. Thus,

Persons find themselves linked—by virtue of blood or tissue type, of rape, of their sexual or social nature—to other persons in need of bodily life support. These needy others are experienced as unalterable "givens" in an agent's life. Their burdensome and difficult presence is experienced as totally beyond voluntary control. It is not now, even if it might be in the future, humanly possible to reverse in all cases the process of renal failure or prevent in all cases the rape-induced or otherwise unwelcome conception.... These are part of the radically involuntary necessities which ground and limit human freedom. Though such givens are unalterable they need not crush human freedom because like other brute facts of life, they are not only unalterable but also received. Agents have a choice about how they are going to respond to such burdens and difficulties. This choice informs and is informed by the dispositional stance the agent has assumed in relation to the finitude and frailty of human existence in general.⁴¹

When all that is said and done, it means that men do not bear the burden of involuntary and compulsory pregnancy and have the freedom to make decisions about their bodies. Such an uneven ethos or teaching can make (and has made) it easier for men to walk away irresponsibly from these and related situations.

Bodily integrity, therefore, is an important requirement in evaluating and understanding genuine reciprocity. It allows the observer to recognize *that* there is a double standard about one's (bodily) autonomy as it relates to RJ. Once one can see this discrepancy, one can expose how simplistic and one-sided our policies, laws, and teachings are. By recognizing the complex and intersectional implications, then, one can usher in a more just paradigm for RJ.

⁴¹ Jung, "Abortion and Organ Donation," 292.

Complexity, Nuances, and Intersectionality

I can think of at least two ways in which inadequate, unsophisticated, and unjust consequences may result from not acknowledging the complexity of RJ. First, defending the life of the fetus is not so simple. The implication for the broad definition of personhood of the fetus is quite complex. Should the Church develop special funerary rites—as a matter of fact, not make any distinctions with other funerals—every time there is an early pregnancy loss? To be extra careful “not to kill an innocent,” since we do not know the precise *moment* when the “moment of conception” happens, should there be a funeral service every time a heterosexual sexual activity does not lead to a pregnancy? Relatedly, what happens when a law enforcement officer pulls over a pregnant woman in the states with High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes reserved for vehicles with a driver and one or more passengers?⁴² Would she be exonerated if she is “alone” but pregnant (therefore, not alone)? If she is not “visibly pregnant,” how would one prove that she is? Would law enforcement need to carry a pregnancy kit? Would pregnant people need to at least carry a certificate? In a wrongful death lawsuit, should the fetus that died on the job inadvertently be considered a life, thereby linking them to the lawsuit, even to the point of designating it as an employee?⁴³ Insofar as the fetus is considered a person, could the state not only give rights and affirm the sanctity of life but also enforce restrictive regulations regarding preserving/freezing of eggs? If it is regulated, why is masturbation not regulated in similar ways? Why is it that in those countries with restrictions

⁴² Vanessa Romo, “Pregnant woman who claimed her fetus was an HOV lane passenger gets another ticket,” *NPR*, September 2, 2022, www.npr.org/2022/09/02/1120628973/pregnant-woman-dallas-fetus-hov-lane-passenger-ticket.

⁴³ St. Louis had a case where the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) faced a lawsuit for the wrongful death of an unborn baby. Susan El Khoury, “Loophole in Missouri Law Means Employers May Be off the Hook if You Die on the Job,” *KMOV*, August 30, 2022, www.kmov.com/2022/08/30/loophole-missouri-law-means-employers-may-be-off-hook-if-you-die-job/.

on freezing eggs, it is often *not* illegal to freeze the sperm?⁴⁴ To highlight the complexity (even absurdity) further, if we are consistent here, one could also claim that male masturbation, which wastes potential opportunities for fecundity, to be a greater crime or sin than cases of rape, which preserves life. Why are men and their bodily integrity not under the similar kind of scrutiny? Why is masturbation not regulated? Why is the status of the sperm not cross-examined? Why are male bodily elements not controlled? Why else other than blatant sexism?

Second, one must also recognize how this complexity is markedly different once they examine the intersecting contexts. For instance, men in the traditional Asian heterosexual households (especially of previous and older generations) occupy and hold different social, familial, and financial space and power than women. In that context, disenfranchised and disempowered women find it difficult simply to walk away from the married relationship even if it is uneven, unjust, and downright abusive. To complicate the matter, many live in tightly knit communities where their community members frown upon abortion or divorce because of the stigma attached to them and the expectation for the collective, parental, and marital roles over the individual, independent, expressive culture, contributing to the absence of agency and personal control.⁴⁵ I have

⁴⁴ Phoebe Zhang, "Single Women Cry Foul as China Doubles Down on Egg Freezing Ban, Accusing Authorities of Gender Bias and Forcing Women into Marriage," *South China Morning Post*, February 2021, www.scmp.com/news/people-culture/gender-diversity/article/3123213/china-reinforces-ban-single-women-freezing.

⁴⁵ "Lack of openness around sexual and reproductive health (SRH) topics contributed to stigma and influenced most participants' decision not to disclose their abortion to family members, which resulted in participants feeling isolated throughout their abortion experience." Sruthi Chandrasekaran, Katherine Key, Abby Ow, Alyssa Lindsey, Jennifer Chin, Bria Goode, Quyen Dinh, Inhe Choi, and Sung Yeon Choimorrow, "The Role of Community and Culture in Abortion Perceptions, Decisions, and Experiences among Asian Americans," *Frontiers in Public Health* 10, no. 982215 (2023), doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.982215. There is a good indication that things are changing. However, even when they are, they do not always result in positive outcomes. "The increased economic role of Asian wives and the associated decline in their husbands' economic power and social status have contributed to marital conflicts." "Marriage and Divorce Statistics of Asian and Pacific Islanders," *National Healthy Marriage Research*

witnessed this dearth manifested in my own community, especially for the reality of the older and first-generation immigrant wives, many of whom rely heavily on their husbands for written and spoken English and family finances to sustain their daily lives. The lack of agency, coupled with the deprivation of it in these ethnic and culturally specific realities, incapacitate women doubly or triply for any chance at their bodily integrity and full human agency.

Furthermore, the anti-abortion movement in the US context is closely linked to racial segregation and the stronghold of whiteness in its Christian contexts. While anti-abortion advocacy is closely linked to the Roman Catholic Church today, its political origins in America may be more strongly tied to the evangelical Religious Right movements. For the US evangelical movement, the New South, which championed racial equality and social justice, acquiesced in the rise of the Religious Right rooted in nationalism, individualism, and free-market capitalism.⁴⁶ Randall Balmer suggests that the court case that galvanized the Religious Right was the 1971 decision in *Green v. Connally*, which threatened the tax-exempt status of religious institutions that discriminated based on race. In other words, Southern white evangelicals could no longer protect the white space in their private schools. Religion and politics were (and are) about white (male) control and domination of their (now threatened) positions of power. Balmer suggests that it was the issue of abortion that became the central political issue to mobilize and successfully galvanize the grassroots white evangelical voters. It became *the* central issue to maintain whiteness in their white spaces.⁴⁷ This strategy is in the same vein of controlling

Centers, www.healthymarriageinfo.org/research-policy/marriage-facts-and-research/marriage-and-divorce-statistics-by-culture/asian-and-pacific-islanders/.

⁴⁶ Randall Herbert Balmer, *Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

⁴⁷ Randall Herbert Balmer, *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), especially Part II. Thus, whiteness is associated with possession, control, and mastery by white men characterized by rationality and self-sufficiency. Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

power in non-consensual human subject research, forced sterilization, and other injustices committed against Black people and their bodies in the United States. Abortion regulations have been a political tool for the maintenance of white superiority and supremacy. The throttlehold of white men usurps the agency of women and people of color for the maintenance of their slowly eroding status quo. Wherever one stands on the highly complex and polarizing issue of abortion, then, it cannot be adequately understood without interrogating the white supremacist underpinning that undergirds the issue. If we continue to recognize the myriad ways women are bound, the non-life affirming invisible hand that takes away the agency of women will become more visible.

It is always tricky to construct a paradigm about reproduction from exclusively men's vantage points because the panels, narratives, and social scripts are often dominantly about and controlled by men. However, in the case of RJ, it may be necessary because men's disappearance from these stories contributes to the lack of their moral accountability. Because of this convenient disappearing act and because of the predominance of blaming the victims in our societies, descriptions must restore men as inter-subjects of RJ discussions, rather than veiling them behind passive voices.⁴⁸

Genuine Reciprocity, therefore, begins by "finding missing fathers" and placing them as partner-subjects of RJ not only in married and separated relationships but relationships in general. Then, by equipping men with egalitarian and reciprocal vision, as I attempted to do here, men might rightly begin considering RJ not only with empathy about mothers but also as their own issue.⁴⁹ Once it is imagined and acknowledged as their

Publishing, 2020), 6; See also J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 2.

⁴⁸ Nancy M. Henley, Michelle Miller, and Jo Anne Beazley, "Syntax, Semantics, and Sexual Violence: Agency and the Passive Voice," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 14, no. 1-2 (1995): 60-84, doi.org/10.1177/0261927X95141004.

⁴⁹ An important resource for conceiving of mutual "sexual projects" between two people who both retain autonomy within the sexual interaction is elaborated upon in Jennifer S. Hirsch

issue, men may discern in charity and compassion rather than judgment or blame. Any institution can initiate such a process. The Catholic Church with its global infrastructure is uniquely positioned to do just that. It can disseminate directives for fathers of the world to be involved, supportive, and responsible. But as Hille Haker argues, individual healing is inadequate when unjust conditions also produce genuine moral dilemmas.⁵⁰ Thus, the Church can also circulate directives for social engagement to bring about structural change. While structural justice by itself will not eliminate unwanted pregnancy, Cristina L.H. Traina suggests that structural justice through “higher wages, cheaper housing, improved access to health care, and better preschool programs” would “reduce unwanted pregnancy’s collateral moral damage to women and to society generally.”⁵¹

However, one can also start at the diocesan or even on the individual-parish level. One might reimagine how men’s organizations—The Men of St. Joseph, Knights of Columbus, That Man is You, Fraternus, Exodus 90, and so forth—could directly address these issues. Through them, men may (re)interpret the Biblical stories, including the story this chapter identifies as part of the problem. Men could be encouraged to imagine “*men* caught in adultery” for instance. In doing so, men in Catholic parish life could come to see how double standards currently function, and could be encouraged to see a better way, a way that fosters empathy and solidarity with women. It might propel other discussions in general, but certainly discussion about relationships and RJ more particularly, to a merciful, graceful, charitable, compassionate, congenial, and loving common ground in justice. Only on these honest, loving, and just grounds can any discussion about RJ become hopeful. If men are not accountable partners of the discussion, then none of it can be genuinely reciprocal.

and Shamus Khan, *Sexual Citizens: Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), xvi, 250.

⁵⁰ Hille Haker, “Compassion for Justice,” *Concilium* 4 (2017): 54–64.

⁵¹ Cristina L.H. Traina, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Unwanted Pregnancy, Mercy, and Solidarity,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 4 (2018): 676, doi.org/10.1111/jore.12240.

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