THE GOSPEL OF WOMANHOOD ACCORDING TO JANE EYRE

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**Introduction**

The devastating oppression of the participation and contribution of women to society in Western culture has given rise to numerous feminist outrages in the last centuries. Individuals have utilized film, literature, and other media outlets to persuade the public to “embrace feminism as the best way to secure [women’s] rights and dignity as persons,” and to end the countless injustices that have denied women access to various opportunities to participate fully in the public arena. ¹ While the promotion of women to their natural place as cherished members of society is a necessary prerequisite for justice to be considered a reality, false premises and misunderstandings about the vocation of women have transformed feminism from a desire for a universal recognition of unique feminine gifts to a selfish agenda for isolated, individual advancement. These misunderstandings include the notion that true freedom is in opposition to solidarity, that it “has no relation to a higher truth or good”, that to recognize a legitimate higher authority is to limit one’s personal freedom, and that religion can only hinder one’s understanding of the human person. ² Conversely, solidarity with others, recognition of authority, and the embrace of a religion can actually enhance freedom, because they serve as guides towards the good and the truth, which can often be obscured from view when they are limited by an individualistic perspective.

The former convictions have influenced various feminist works in modern times. For example, in Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll House*, the protagonist, Nora, chooses to abandon her family and her responsibilities as wife and mother upon recognizing her husband’s long, dominating role in their marriage. When questioned about her duties to her children, Nora states that she has other duties just as sacred: “duties to myself.” ³ Nora’s resolve to leave her family in order to find “herself” demonstrates the modern belief that freedom can only be found in isolation from
others, and that the morality of an action is subordinate to one’s right to individualism. Although it is true that a person’s self must be fully realized if one is to give completely of oneself, this occurs not through individualism, but rather, through relations with others. If Nora were truly free, she would be open to guidance from others and would make her decision in the context of something greater than herself: love. She would discern that her choice dismisses the needs and desires of her children, and that the logic that leads her to her decision is entirely individualistic. In her quest for freedom, Nora can be considered a slave to egoism.

Contrasting Nora’s individualistic perspective is the selfless philosophy regarding the vocation of woman as demonstrated through the actions and choices of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre. Jane’s interactions with her fellow characters as well as the self-sacrificing decisions she makes demonstrate the fundamental ideals of womanhood, namely self-giving love for the honor of our Lord, as outlined in the works of Pope John Paul II. In Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, the title character yearns for those that remain the deepest desires of a woman’s heart: “to be romanced, to play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure, and to unveil beauty.” From the very beginning of the novel, Jane understands she was created for nothing less than love, a truth that her present society, afflicted by prejudice and selfishness, cannot comprehend. This unfailing conviction leads her on an incredible journey to discern her particular vocation to love, provides her with the courage to reject mere imitations of love, and allows her to protest the many societal injustices due to gender and class inequalities that prevent her from fulfilling her vocation. Above all, however, Jane’s convictions singularly align with the exhortations of John Paul II, that the “eternal source” of “the dignity and vocation of women” can only be found “in the heart of God.” Throughout the novel, Jane humbly acknowledges and submits herself to a higher power, even when this submission stands in contrast to her individual desires. Facing the
rejection of that for which she has longed, Jane nevertheless resolves, “I will keep the law given by God, sanctioned by man.” Such a selfless response contradicts the platform of modern feminism.

In order to fully appreciate Jane’s expression of womanhood, one must analyze the many injustices suffered by women in 19th Century England, the responses to these injustices that have helped to build the modern feminist movement, the vision of John Paul II for the restoration of woman in the world, and the manner in which Jane Eyre manifests this vision. A comprehensive understanding of these issues will allow women to manifest the vision of John Paul II in their own lives, thus gaining freedom through solidarity, love, and faith.

**Education and the Workforce in 19th Century England**

Within the context of the long history of civilization, humanity has only recently begun to examine and critique the ways in which women were denied the freedom to develop as individuals in the years prior to the 19th Century, as well as to attempt to establish a fairer, more just society for both sexes. In his *Letter to Women*, the late Pope John Paul II expressed his deepest sorrow over the long-standing relegation of women “to the margins of society” and his profound appreciation for those women who contributed to the “history of humanity” despite the fact that “they were frequently at a disadvantage from the start, excluded from equal educational opportunities, underestimated, ignored, and not given credit for their intellectual achievements.” These disadvantages include the refusal of the admittance of females to institutions of higher learning, a stark difference in the curriculum for girls and boys, and limited opportunities for employment outside the home. While false beliefs regarding masculine superiority influenced their attitudes, British society in the 19th Century also lacked a complete understanding of the biology and psychology of women, which obscured its understanding of true femininity. For
example, academic study was believed to be detrimental to the health of a woman’s reproductive system, as the stress involved was believed to affect her ability to reproduce. Nevertheless, the perseverance of several female individuals, such as Dorothea Beale and Emily Davies, who led their gender in the triumph over seemingly insurmountable obstacles, raised appreciation for the immense dignity of woman and will hopefully inspire a new generation that will strive to protect the inherent worth of the female spirit.

In the 19th Century, the many alternatives regarding higher education available to boys and young men produced for them virtually limitless futures. Contrarily, the dearth of educational options for women restricted their freedom in the public sphere. As Patricia Hollis explains, “there was nothing equivalent to the boys’ great public schools and universities”, and women were denied admittance into these institutions for most of the 19th Century. For example, the University of Oxford did not grant women full membership until 1920; moreover, they were only allowed to sit through examinations and attend lectures approximately forty years previously. Dismayed by these unjust disadvantages, certain members of British society resolved to rectify this situation. In 1848, social reformer Frederick Denison Maurice founded Queen’s College, the first women’s college that served the needs of governesses and future governesses, in the hopes of “raising the standard of their accomplishments and thus entitling them to higher remuneration.” In 1858, Dorothea Beale founded the Cheltenham Ladies’ College, a pioneering day high school for girls. In 1869, Emily Davies established Girton College, the first residential college for women. These accomplishments served to advance the role of women in the social order and expand their opportunities in the field of education.

The few educational opportunities available to women prior to this time, such as attending a boarding school or receiving instruction from a governess, provided girls with a
“separate curriculum” that consisted in training in the virtues of “good housewifery and domestic management.” 13 They were oftentimes only instructed in attaining accomplishments such as French, music, and drawing that would “enable” them “to shine and attract” a future husband, rather than provide for them any real use. 14 However, the attraction of a future husband by means of accomplishments is not the true aim of education; rather, education is “intellectual, moral, and physical development . . . the discipline of the will and the affections to obey the supreme law of duty, the kindling and strengthening of the love of knowledge, of beauty, of goodness.” 15 The exclusive study of stereotypically feminine tasks denied women the opportunity to discover new facets of themselves through the study of traditionally masculine subjects, such as mathematics, Latin, and Greek. If the development of the human person as a whole is the ultimate end of education, then an education in the liberal arts can only better prepare women to be wives, mothers, and contributors to society. Elizabeth Wolstenhome entreated the public to consider the expansion of educational opportunities for women so that “women themselves may not be robbed…of intellectual effort and achievement, and that society which needs their help so much may not be defrauded of their best and worthiest service.” 16 As John Paul II explains, these numerous disadvantages “reduced” the role of women in society to “servitude” and “prevented women from truly being themselves.” 17

In this time period, women were considered to be healthy not solely by their physical well-being, but also by the extent to which they were attached to their “prescribed sphere.” 18 If a woman ventured outside this sphere, she was often judged to be an unhealthy woman, unfit for feminine duties. Thus, some dissenters argued that women were not biologically suited for the intellectual efforts that academic study requires, and that the added stress from beyond their homes would affect their ability to give birth to healthy children. An inaccurate understanding of
the female reproductive system affected the minds of this time. Inadequate information about a woman’s menstrual cycle led physicians to believe that women were “psychologically unstable”, and that rest, not academic study, was the best insurance for the development of healthy reproductive systems in teenage girls.  

Thus, if a young woman ventured outside the sphere of the home, she was apt to develop conditions that would affect her motherhood and, consequently, the future race of mankind. Advances in the knowledge of female anatomy, such as the realization that the reproductive organs are not newly generated in adolescence, allowed the feminist movement to demonstrate that the barrier between women and education did not lie in the realm of science, but rather in society’s obstinacy in adhering to cultural conventions. A letter to Dr. Hodgson challenged this barrier, saying, “I would draw no line of demarcation, so as to limit the extent of knowledge which either boy or girl may acquire. I would throw open the portals of knowledge freely to both. Let each sex acquire what it can.”

Because this barrier segregated women from society and virtually confined them within the home, it also affected their employment in the workforce. The age of industrialism moved the majority of employment from agricultural labor and small family-owned shops to industries outside the home, which was considered unsuitable for middle-class women. It was acceptable for impoverished women to work in these industries, who struggled to provide for their families. However, this external work was especially incompatible with the responsibilities of married women, who were obliged to care for their husband and children. Furthermore, women seeking employment often faced discrimination as females were considered physically and emotionally weaker than men. Consequently, women were viewed as the less efficient sex. Their responsibilities as wives and mothers also necessitated occasional absences, especially during pregnancy and childbirth, which negatively influenced their reputation as diligent workers.
Thus, factory owners of physically demanding industries were more likely to hire strong, capable men rather than women.

Because of the limited educational opportunities available to women, they were often not competent to accomplish tasks that required specific skills. Consequently, lack of instruction in traditionally masculine subjects denied women access to various services, including healing the sick as doctors, practicing law, teaching at universities, and serving in Parliament. Furthermore, according to Lewis, “employers accepted the stereotypical ideas of women’s capacities, often without any direct experience of employing women.” Therefore, employers often did not even consider women for certain tasks because it was presumed that their delicate natures could not handle the rigors of necessary training. They were immediately judged to be inferior workers. In addition to the discriminations women faced as laborers, for a large part of the 19th Century, the only careers open to single women were that of a governess or domestic servant. The majority of the careers of all working women during this time period further reflects the lack of opportunity that was granted to women. In 1881, the occupations of 76 percent of employed women included those of domestic servants, textile factory workers, and teachers or nurses. While it is interesting to note that these jobs draw upon the skills of keeping a household and raising children, the lack of diversity of careers among women demonstrates a dearth of opportunities. Thus, arbitrary limitations placed on women’s career choices denied women the full freedom to give of themselves to others. In accord with the teachings of John Paul II, feminist theorist Mill argues “it was important for this small pool of female talent to be permitted free choice of occupation” because any restrictions would deny them the ability to “contribute to human development.”

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Additionally, employers discriminated against women by paying them significantly lower wages than their male co-workers. Generally, a woman at this time earned approximately half the salary of a man “for doing work as well and as quickly as men.”

For example, from 1906-1935, women in the manufacturing industry received approximately 43.7% of what a man typically earned. Only in the textile industry did women fare slightly better, earning approximately 58.5% of a man’s salary. Both married and unmarried women suffered from these lower wages. Unmarried women were forced to care for themselves, as well as other close family members, with insufficient earnings. These women struggled, working twice as hard simply to survive. Some women, because of this lower rate, found themselves earning extra money through prostitution, a sad fate caused by a seriously prejudiced society.

While the rates for men and women often differed, some industries, most notably the weaving industry, provided equal rates for men and women. Nevertheless, men still earned roughly 36% more money than women, because they were given specific duties, such as tuning and adjusting looms, that were believed to be too complex for women. Because women did not perform these duties, significant amounts of money were deducted from their wages, yet another display of the prejudice that was tolerated in this society.

In addition to their supposed physical inferiority, women were believed to be less loyal than men to a business because of their chief commitment to their families. Because pregnancy and childbirth confines a woman to her bed for some days, she is rendered incapable of work. Furthermore, a woman’s first commitment to her children might require her presence at home; how can such requirements be compatible with the worldly goals of a commercial business?

Some companies resolved this issue by simply hiring men. After all, in their opinion, a man with no biological or familial restraints is more cost-productive for a company. Meanwhile, some
companies forced employed women to resign upon marriage. For example, in 1875, the British Post Office required resignation upon a woman’s marriage, compelling a number of women to choose between work and marriage. Men, however, were never asked this question. It was immediately assumed that man’s first commitment was to his work, rather than to his family, as if no responsibilities changed upon his becoming a father. Unfortunately, this mindset continues to be prevalent in society.

Greed blinded the employers of the 19th century, rendering impossible a recognition of and appreciation for the tremendous beauty of motherhood and family. Consequently, some women sacrificed human love in order to have the freedom to develop as an individual and work for their fellow man in the public sphere. For example, Florence Nightingale, unhappy that her faculties as an upper-class woman were only to be used to entertain at frivolous parties inside the home, served the sick as a nurse. She eventually founded a nursing college in 1857 that provided women with the means to “establish a professional identity.” However, in order to dedicate herself to this important work that she considered a calling from God, Nightingale refused the love of the intellectual and social reformer Richard Milnes, an agonizing decision for her. In explaining her choice, Nightingale wrote, “I have a moral, an active, nature which requires satisfaction, and that would not find it in his [Milnes’] life.” Another young woman, Beatrice Webb, whose work as a single woman revolved around politics, refused the hand of her beloved, for “she knew that to marry him would cut her off forever from the purposeful life of work that she also wanted.” Thus, almost imperceptibly, working women came to resent the unique gift of their femininity and the beauty of marriage because it excluded them from developing their individuality within the public sphere.

**Modern Individualism and Isolation**
The feminist outcry for justice, begun in the later part of this millennium yet influencing demonstrable change throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries, was the only appropriate response to such discrimination. However, as victims of long-standing bigotry, women distrusted their fellow man and harbored resentment against the unique aspects of their femininity, such as wifehood and motherhood, for which they experienced discrimination. Instead of trying to reconcile and reclaim this mutual trust, women sought to reclaim their identities as mature individuals by isolating themselves and their decisions from others. They possessed the right to make independent, unencumbered choices and lead their own lives, they asserted; the beliefs, feelings, and even rights of others who would be affected by their decisions, such as fathers, children, and unborn children, could be neglected and buried beneath a gleaming slogan of independence and equality. This philosophy, known as modern individualism, is most clearly evident in the pro-abortion movement and in society’s scorn of stay-at-home mothers.

The true meaning of the inherent freedom that a woman possesses has been misconstrued in recent decades. As Helen Alvaré states, proponents of modern feminism believe that “freedom equals a right to do whatever [they] want, whenever [they] want, regardless of whether others are hurt or whether truth is violated.” Rather, freedom involves an active search for truth and goodness, which allows an individual to grow in perfection of love. According to the traditional perspective of the Catholic Church, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “freedom is the power to act or not to act, and so to perform deliberate acts of one's own. Freedom attains perfection in its acts when directed toward God, the sovereign Good.” An egocentric view of freedom can lead to the justification that an individual’s freedom can disregard and even infringe upon the rights of others. For example, the results of the Supreme Court Case of Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey further emphasized
one’s “individual rights” while disregarding the importance of “mutual responsibility.” In this case, spousal notification, which requires wives to simply notify their husbands that they are choosing to terminate the life of their child, and parental consent, which would require minors to obtain their parents’ permission before having an abortion, were deemed unconstitutional. Due to this logic, fathers are left helpless and voiceless about the life and death of their child. Furthermore, the importance of the role of parents is undermined when neither their consent nor their knowledge is required for a minor to undergo a serious medical procedure. Consequently, the exaltation of the freedom of the individual has severed relationships within families, removed connections that bind persons together, and denied the rights of others who are affected by the situation. Therefore, “protection of a woman’s right to choose her own destiny” merely promotes a woman’s isolation.

Additionally, the injustices that women experienced in the public sphere resulted from the mistaken belief that the childbearing nature of women makes them less capable of intellectual work and limits their performance in the workforce. While the early feminists rightly focused upon changing these opinions through the expansion of a woman’s role in the world, its impact upon family life and motherhood was disregarded. In woman’s pursuit of individuality, motherhood, rather than empowering women with the fullness of femininity, became seen as a burden, or a hindrance to a woman’s independence. In fact, it was considered the “chief and necessary constraint on women’s achievements”, a kind of slavery or joyless sacrifice through which a woman subsists only via her children. Meanwhile, work outside the home became viewed as the only genuine means through which individuals could achieve self-fulfillment. For example, Linda R. Hirshman purports such a philosophy that she describes in her work addressed to the women of the world:
Bounding home is not good for women, and it’s not good for the society. The women aren’t using their capacities fully…. Their talent and education are lost from the public world to the private world of laundry and kissing boo-boos….Childcare and housekeeping have satisfying moments but are not occupations likely to produce a flourishing life.  

As Canadian public policy analyst Tasha Kheriddan has observed, radical feminists have denounced motherhood, housewifery, and the traditional family as “impediment[s] to self-fulfillment”, and children “as a barrier to a successful career.” Like Kheriddan, more and more mothers have become disillusioned by the allure of self-fulfillment in work outside the home. While the freedom to work is essential for the development of the whole human person, only 21 percent of mothers believe that full-time work is actually ideal because of their desire to nurture their children. Nevertheless, in the feminist’s individualistic quest for self-discovery, the dignity of the vocation of marriage and motherhood has been lost.

Unfortunately, the early feminists did not address family life or the supremacy of the subjective purpose of work in their pursuit of independence. Consequently, the feminist movement “amounted to a complete rejection of family life rather than a demand for its restructuring.” This rejection only begins to indicate the extent to which society has rejected the reality of a necessarily interconnected community. This rejection has had significant ramifications upon our present culture, as it undermines the very purpose and essence of the human being as revealed in the Book of Genesis and in the writings of Pope John Paul II.

**Original Solitude and a Communion of Persons**

According to the book of Genesis, God created man on the sixth day, saying, “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” Traditionally, Christians believe the likeness of man to His creator lies in his gifts of intellect and free will, gifts that no other creature on earth possesses. As Richard M. Hogan observes, “Free will and intellect constitute the human person
as an image of God.” However, limiting the capacity of the human person to reflect God in these two attributes is comparable to limiting the vastness of the universe to a few stars.

To gain a greater understanding of God the Creator, and consequently all of humanity, it is interesting to note the use of plurality in the above-quoted verse of Scripture: “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness” (emphasis added). God, therefore, is not a “solitude”; rather, He exists as a Trinity, or an “eternal communion of Three persons.” The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all participate in a life-giving, love-giving relationship that has existed throughout all of eternity. God the Father “pours out the fullness of Himself” to God the Son, and the Son returns all that He has to His father as a “perfect expression of thanks and love.” This real, active exchange of love between the two persons becomes the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity: the Holy Spirit. Thus, an essential attribute of God is living in communion with others, for God is, truly and exceptionally, love.

Because man was made in the image and likeness of God, then, he is called to live like Him – he is called to mirror His love by living in authentic relationships with others and participating in a community of love. In the words of Carl Anderson, the Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, “Our being in the likeness of God is manifest in how we, like the Trinity, are oriented toward others in family and in community for love, and how our relationships with others are defined by and reflect the persons of the Trinity.” Isolation is incompatible with the human person’s fundamental vocation to love.

According to John Paul II, the creation of woman was both a sign from God that the human person is called to live in communion with one another and a fulfillment of man’s fundamental vocation. When God created Adam as master of the Garden of Eden, He realized that it was “not good for man to be alone”. Without another human being, Adam could not fulfill
his vocation to love; he could not fully give of himself to another. Consequently, God created all of the animals and living things in order to help fulfill Adam’s quest to discover a “suitable partner.” 52 Despite God’s wonderful creations, Adam still could find no meaning in his life, because without another human person, he could not participate in love. God, in His wisdom, intended this experience of loneliness and meaninglessness from the beginning of creation.

Richard M. Hogan clarifies the meaning of Adam’s solitude:

Just after he was created, Adam experienced an agonizing loneliness because he discovered that he could not fulfill himself as God intended. Adam was created in the image of God to do what God does, i.e., love. He longed to love. But since Adam was composed of body and soul, he needed to express love for someone (another human person) in and through his body. However, when Adam was first created ... he was the only human being. He had no one like himself to love. He could not truly love the animals because love is a mutual self-donation of at least two persons to one another. It was the discovery that only he was a person called to love in and through a physical body which led directly to his loneliness. As God knew “from the beginning”, it is not good for man to be alone. But Adam had to experience solitude...his unique call to imitate God in love expressed through the body, before he could realize his need for other human persons.53

It is interesting to note that one of man’s deepest sufferings leads to a greater understanding of the human person. When one, such as Adam, suffers an unbearable loneliness, appreciation for the beauty of community swells. However, a cross need not always accompany this understanding. Woman herself is also sacramental, or is a special sign, of the reality that we are called to live in communion with others, as God has entrusted her very body to bring forth His creation. By sheltering children within her very self, she is a holy sanctuary of new life. As Pope John Paul II explains, “God entrusts the human being to her [woman] in a special way”, and an awareness of His entrusting is that which renders a woman “strong.” 54 Therefore, since motherhood is primarily a call to the protection of the human person, then the duty of society should perforce be the protection of motherhood.
Pope John Paul II continually reminds the Church of the equal dignity of man and woman. He expresses an “urgent need to achieve real equality” in order to build a civilization founded upon justice and virtue, citing such examples as equal pay for equal work and protection for working mothers.  

This equality signifies that women not only possess the right to work, but also “must work”, in order to “fulfill their very humanity” by reflecting the image of a creative God. However, it does not suggest that man and woman are identical; if there were no sexual differences, then there could be no masculine or feminine gifts and, consequently, no such thing as the feminine genius. John Paul II explains this appreciation of diversity by saying, “Clearly all of this does not mean for women a renunciation of their femininity or an imitation of the male role, but the fullness of true feminine humanity which should be expressed in their activity, whether in the family or outside of it.”

Accordingly, the work of a woman can occur either within the home or within the marketplace. The Holy Father affirms that women “should be able to fulfill their tasks in accordance with their own nature, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs for which they are capable”, including those outside the home. However, it is imperative that one does not overlook the daily labor of a mother and wife, for motherhood is indeed work. In fact, the Holy Father expresses that it is work of the “noblest” kind since it is “directly concerned with people”. Within the home, a mother “brings order to creation” for the sake of her family, in addition to serving the community that God has entrusted to her care. Thus, the woman’s right to work coincides with her most important work within her family, her vocational work. Because the human person has been particularly entrusted to woman, the physical and emotional presence of a mother within the home is of the utmost importance.
Society must work for the advancement of women while protecting, rather than disregarding, the irreplaceable role of the mother.

However, the prevailing perspective of modern society regarding labor does not consider the significant work of a wife and mother. As Richard M. Hogan states, “the mother’s job is not valued in society because generally there is a misunderstanding of work in most industrialized societies.” 60 With the advent of industrialization, emphasis has been placed upon the productivity of an employee rather than his or her personhood. The worth of an employee has become dependent upon his value to the company, and it is acceptable and even commendable for managers to consider primarily their “material success” rather than their workers’ needs or the needs of their families. 61 This philosophy stands in contrast with the teachings of the Catholic Church. The Church teaches that work “was created as a means for [humanity], as images of God, to share in the divine creative act.” 62 Through work, a man can become more like God, thus achieving his salvation as well as providing for his family. However, when man exists for work, rather than work existing for man, dangerous conclusions are liable to become reality. Parents, whose primary vocations are motherhood and fatherhood, can tend to value their careers more than their fundamental duties within the home. Furthermore, society can overlook and even denigrate the value of the work of a mother within the home, since she is “not earning any money, nor producing anything tangible.” 63 Feminists, who strove for the advancement of freedom of choice, often disparage modern mothers who choose to remain at home and care for their children. For example, Elizabeth Wurtzel purports such a philosophy in her article for the magazine, the *Atlantic*:

> Being a mother isn't really work. Yes, of course, it's something -- actually, it's something almost every woman at some time does, some brilliantly and some brutishly and most in the boring middle of making okay meals and decent kid conversation. But let's face it: It is not a selective position. A job that anyone can have is not a job, it's a part of life. 64
Is there any icon to whom society can turn to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable forces of a woman’s right to work and the beauty of serving the human person? A recognition of the need for community while remaining a unique individual? The desire to cultivate and utilize one’s intelligence while embracing femininity and demanding the virtues of others? The answer is yes, and one only needs to open one of the greatest classical romances to discover her.

**Jane Eyre and the Vocation to Love**

The title character of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* embodies the ideals of the feminist movement, namely the right of every female to participate and contribute to society within the public sphere, while embracing the tenets of Christian humanism and recognizing the necessity of community. As literary critic Carla Kaplan accordingly notes, “Jane is a paradigm of the narrative desire for intimacy and recognition” and her “desires – for intimacy, recognition, sisterhood, a change in her gender and class position and in the meanings attached to such categories – resonate with every important theme in the history of the feminist struggle.”

Much like Adam’s encounter with original solitude, Jane Eyre’s experiences and interactions, or lack thereof, with others throughout her sad, neglected childhood enable her to understand keenly her vocation to love and be loved. Her desire for love is so great not because abuse has broken her spirit, but rather because she comes to recognize this desire as her particular destiny as well as the destiny of humanity. Furthermore, by advancing in her education and becoming a governess, Jane gains a greater awareness of the constraints that society has placed upon women and laments the consequent isolation from others that inevitably develops. Finally, while these experiences ultimately serve to bolster her joy in achieving communion with others, Jane discovers that the fullness of this joy of community while maintaining her unique individuality
can and, for Jane, must occur through marriage – a marriage with Edward Rochester. Marriage and freedom are therefore not incompatible, but rather, intrinsically interconnected.

Jane commences her autobiographical account and quest for love as a young, orphaned child at Gateshead Hall, the miserable home of her Aunt Reed and three cousins. There, Jane endures a lonesome, loveless childhood and passes her days dejected, neglected, and abused. Her “economic dependence” and low social class ostracize her from her haughty relatives, who love nothing more than to ridicule Jane and her lowly state. In the introductory paragraphs, Jane likens the miseries of a cold winter’s walk to that of the hostility and hauteur she meets upon arriving home: the “penetrating” rain, the “leafless shrubbery”, and the “raw twilight” seem not so adverse to her as coming home with a heart “humbled by the consciousness of [her] physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed”. The novel opens as Jane finds her relatives gathered round the sofa beside a blazing fireside – a fire that warms their “nipped fingers and toes” but cannot penetrate the iciness of their cold hearts. Joining the ranks of Cinderella and Harry Potter, Jane, a fellow orphan, endures her early years feeling like “a discord in Gateshead Hall…like nobody…a useless thing.” Kaplan summarizes the opening of the novel by describing it as an “[immersion] in negations – she is denied activity (there was no possibility of taking a walk that day), banished (dispensed from joining the group), and muzzled (be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent).”

Surprisingly, such treatment does not injure her self-esteem; it conversely augments her own sense of self-worth. Though she is young, Jane recognizes the perversity and brutality of her relatives’ treatment and, consequently, considers herself above anyone who is willing to commit such cruelty. When overhearing her aunt discussing Jane inferiority with Eliza, John and Georgiana, Jane, impassioned, cries, “They are not fit to associate with me!” Jane sees the
neglect and abuse she experiences as a tragic injustice, not simply because no child should ever undergo such a sad existence, but because she believes that everyone deserves love. Indeed, her words and choices further in the story reflect this same philosophy. After Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst, master of Lowood school, a poor institution for girls, accuse Jane of deceit, she cries, “You think I have no feelings, and that I can live without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so.” 71 Later, she confesses to her friend, Helen, the full extent of her hunger for love and what she is willing to sacrifice in order to glean the least fragment of human affection: “If others don’t love me, I would rather die than live . . . I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest.” 72 Jane’s impassioned outcry, though hyperbolic, reveals the magnitude of her yearning for love and the degree of her deprivation.

Jane also recognizes that while she needs to receive love, it is equally important for her to give love as well. When Helen is quarantined and dying of consumption, Jane slips past the nurses to lie with her through the night; for the sake of friendship and love, she disregards any consequence such an action might have upon her health. In Jane’s eyes, physical pain, no matter how agonizing, seems an extreme but not implausible barter in exchange for love. Indeed, her intense desire for human love corroborates the teachings of Pope John Paul II, who declared, “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself; his life is senseless.” 73 Unlike many modern feminists who see their individual rights in competition with the rights of others and so believe the assertion of their rights over others is the only path to freedom, Jane chooses to freely give herself to and receive from others. Thus, she discovers the freedom of her own perfection in love.
Jane continues this search for community and love throughout her adult life. Because Jane’s aunt and cousins had disowned her upon sending her to Lowood School, Jane embarks on her adult life without a family to whom she can turn. Although Jane ultimately finds the fulfillment of her desires for family through marriage and motherhood, Jane encounters characters throughout the novel with whom she attains fulfilling friendships. For example, after returning from a brief retreat from work, Jane is greeted with smiles and embraces from her ward, Adele, as well as the rest of the staff of Thornfield. Pleased and somewhat surprised by this reaction, Jane contentedly comments, “There is no happiness like that of being loved by our fellow-creatures, and feeling that your presence is an addition to their comfort.” Furthermore, Jane’s desire for community and love of others surfaces upon her arrival to the household of the Rivers family. Many days do not pass before Jane develops strong friendships with Diana and Mary Rivers. In fact, she discovers immense pleasure in their “perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles”. She shares not only their interests, but also their love for home and for the beauty of their natural surroundings. St. John Rivers accurately assesses Jane’s nature, saying that “human affections and sympathies have a most powerful hold on you,” and “solitude is at least as bad for you as it is for me.” His analysis is further corroborated when Jane receives a small fortune upon the death of her uncle and learns that the members of the Rivers family are in actuality her cousins. To say that Jane is thrilled would be an understatement; however, her joy stems not primarily from her new material wealth, but rather because she has discovered family, “kindred – those with whom [she has] full fellow feeling.” She generously shares her fortune with her new family, an act of kindness which enables St. John’s sisters, who had been employed elsewhere as house-servants, to return to them and live together as one family. Joyously, she cries, “Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed! –
wealth to the heart! – a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing…Oh, I am glad!”  

Jane’s genuine exclamations reflect the extent of the influence that intimate communion with others has upon her pining heart. Kaplan, in her critical analysis of the text, extends this keen observation by asserting that, “Jane’s most compelling description of ideal human interaction and satisfaction of her desires for contact is offered . . . in terms of her exchanges with Diana and Mary Rivers . . . . Diana and Mary fulfill ‘the craving I have for fraternal and sisterly love’.”

While Jane finds fulfillment through her interactions with others, she is nevertheless isolated due to the limitations placed upon her by society. At Lowood School, she studies the stereotypical subjects that are reserved for girls: “the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, drawing, and music.” These subjects, or rather, accomplishments, are immediately assessed upon Jane’s arrival at Thornfield. As a master scrutinizing the skills of his employed governess, Edward Rochester questions her, “And now what did you learn at Lowood? Can you play?” He proceeds to judge her talents in piano-playing, as well as examine her drawings, as if these accomplishments could reflect the entirety of Jane as a woman. Upon his analysis, Rochester comments, “The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs.” However, Rochester soon discovers that Jane’s intelligence and independent thought far surpasses that which is normally expected of women, a truth that speaks for the intelligence of all of womankind. Indeed, Rochester eventually declares that Jane has “a man’s vigorous brain” and “a woman’s heart”, a comment that reflects both the gender biases of Victorian culture and its utter lack of truth. In one of their first conversations, Jane and Rochester engage in a witty exchange regarding what constitutes the superiority of one individual over another, what a man must do to gain salvation, and the insolence or acceptability of certain comments. Jane has no reservations about voicing
her opinion, though some of her views stand in contrast with both her master’s opinions and with the typical beliefs of British society during the mid-1840s. Rochester comments that Jane responds “promptly” and in a manner that is “frank and sincere”, which distinguishes her from typical women with her limited education. Even Charlotte Brontë’s decision to write this novel in the first person augments Jane’s confidence in herself, as she directly confronts the reader with her story. For example, when explaining her solitary journeys through the estate and her longing for a greater experience of the world she asserts, “Anybody may blame me who likes.” Jane’s independent spirit confirms the equal intelligence of man and woman, and demonstrates the need for society to begin to cultivate the valuable minds of women.

After completing her studies at Lowood School, Jane remains as a schoolteacher, starting a career that brings her reasonable independence. However, after spending eight years at Lowood, as both a pupil and instructor, Jane yearns for a change to her mundane life: “I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer.” However, the only paying careers that were available to women at this time were teaching and governessing, due to the constraints of her social class, economic status, and gender. Jane does not possess the social freedom to advance independently or begin a new career, which she believes is not only unjust, but also detrimental to the feminine spirit. In one of the most famous passages of the novel, Jane laments:

I longed for a power of vision that might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of, but never seen; that then I desired more practical experience than I possessed . . . . Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded . . . to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them or laugh at them; if they seek to do more and learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. Jane’s discourse demonstrates the injustice of society’s prevailing expectations of women.

Rather than dwell on the limited circumstances in which she has been placed, however, Jane
abandons her plea for liberty in order to “[frame] a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus…grant me at least a new servitude!” Jane’s prayer is accordingly answered. She leaves her post as schoolteacher and becomes a governess at Thornfield.

Becoming a governess in 19th Century England isolated the woman who followed this path from much of society; indeed it was one of the most solitary careers for women in this time period. The profession placed one in a position of inferiority to one’s employers as well as superiority to the servants of an estate. Thus, a governess was of a social class of her own. Sociologists have described the daily reality of these women as suffering from “status incongruity”, since social barriers prevented governesses from participation in a real community. Jane experiences firsthand this incongruity through her interactions with Blanche Ingram, the beautiful young maiden Rochester invites to Thornfield to stir jealousy within Jane. The Ingrams represent those within the high ranks of British society who believe that one must condescend in order to converse with governesses, who are “detestable”, “ridiculous”, and “all incubi.” The mother of the young Blanche Ingram begs her daughter, “My dearest, don’t mention governesses; the word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency, and caprice; I thank Heaven I have now done with them.” Nevertheless, Jane finds immense joy through her work with Adele, her interactions with the servants of Thornfield with whom she is friends, and most especially through her relationship with Edward Rochester, who treats her not as his inferior, but as his “equal”, his “likeness.” As Jane explains of her experience of Thornfield, “I have lived in it a full and delightful life…I have not been trampled on. I have not been excluded from every glimpse of communion with what is bright, and energetic, and high.”
After a remarkable journey of self-discovery, Jane decides to marry Edward Rochester, believing that that is her true vocation. Although Jane decried the status of women who are restricted to “making puddings and knitting stockings”, this is in fact the vocation she discovers and embraces for herself. Many literary critics see this conclusion as indicative of the overarching power of Victorian society, and as seeming to “contradict or at least call into question [Jane’s] commitment to feminism.” Indeed, Jane’s marriage can seem, especially to modern readers, to be an abandonment of the feminist ideals of independence and participation in the public sphere. Even Jane’s joyful exclamations seem to support this idea of abandonment: “Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice?” she questions. “To be privileged to put my arms round what I value – to press my lips to what I love - to repose in what I trust; is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then I certainly delight in sacrifice.” More significantly, however, Jane’s decision indicates the truth that one’s vocation is primarily a call not to self-serving, but rather to self-giving. Jane, like all humanity, is called to unconditional love, and the sacrifices that a marriage inevitably entails in order to best serve one’s family are not hindrances to this call. While many marriages in this time period necessitated the sacrifice of a woman’s dignity and confined her within the home, Jane and Rochester’s marriage involves an equal appreciation for the other, due to Jane’s insistence on submission to God-given laws on the sanctity of marriage rather than to Rochester’s request that she become his mistress. By refusing Rochester’s request, Jane demands that Rochester value her for her unique individuality, rather than for what she can provide. Indeed, it is Jane’s integrity that allows for the blossoming of their relationship, bolstering the claim that marriage allows for two individuals to become “truly one with each other and [to] still find [their] individual identities intact and even enhanced.” Marriage, when embraced with an understanding of the equal dignities of man and woman and the supremacy of
God, is a legitimate and beautiful vocation for women that allows for a full development of the feminine genius. The marriage of two individuals who both express love for one another and reverence their Creator manifests the image of God who exists in communion, which provides women the opportunity to love to their fullest capacity. The journey that Jane and Rochester undertake in order to achieve this understanding will now be explored.

**Oppression of Women in 19th Century England**

Throughout history, woman has suffered at the hands of dominating men. Pope John Paul II has strongly affirmed the equal dignities of men and women and has praised those societies who have reformed their laws and have granted women rights that were originally only reserved for men, such as voting privileges and the right to own property. Nevertheless, women today continue to suffer. In April of 2012, the United Nations reported that while the actual number of victims of human trafficking is unknown, 2.4 million people are victims to this tragic injustice at any one time. Of these 2.4 million individuals, 80 percent are used for sexual purposes, and two out of every three victims are women. Furthermore, 85 percent of all victims of domestic abuse are women, and one out of every four women will experience some form of domestic violence during her life. In 19th Century England, the plight of women was arguably much worse, as the British legal system helped to enforce the oppression of women. Under the Contagious Diseases Acts, female prostitutes were punished, while the behavior of the men who sought the services of prostitutes was excused. Furthermore, upon marriage, women lost all their rights. They had no right to own property, and, as such, could be separated from their children, who were considered the property of their husbands, without the ruling of a court. These measures caused a fear to rise within women, and led them to place their own desires above the words of authority, even the authority of God.
In 1864, British Parliament passed the Contagious Disease Acts, one of the worst subjections of women in modern times, in an effort to decrease the flagrant prostitution that was tearing apart families. According to this law, the police could arrest any woman found within a garrison town, subject her to mandatory medical inspection, and detain her if any trace of venereal disease were found. Consequently, mistakes were often made; innocent women were habitually arrested and inspected. However, even more distressing is the fact that men escaped any punishment for their part in prostitution. In defense of the role of men in prostitution, the Royal Commission stated that “with one sex the offence [prostitution] is committed as a matter of gain, with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse.” Supporters of the Acts even went so far as to assert that “prostitutes were traders and the customer should be protected from ‘faulty’ goods.” Thus, the Contagious Diseases Acts purported the opinion that it was natural for men to use a prostitute’s services, while the prostitute herself was wicked and deserved punishment. Women, according to these acts, were considered a “source of contamination” and received all the blame for a service that was simply acceptable for men. The blatant injustice of this double standard infuriated certain individuals, and called them to action.

Josephine Butler, a leading feminist of the 19th Century, was one such individual. While she agreed that prostitution could lead to the deterioration of the family, she nevertheless observed the double standard in the Contagious Diseases Acts that both enslaved women and continued to debase family life. “It is unjust” she wrote, “to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause, both of the vice and its dreaded consequences.” After much effort from like-minded individuals, the Acts were repealed in 1886, but not without inflicting several wounds upon the feminine spirit, wounds that exist to
this very day in the form of extreme feminism. The ability to choose anything, even that which violates another’s right, is preferred over oppression.

In addition to these injustices, women suffered at the hands of dominating men within their marriage. In 19th Century England, marriage entailed the loss of virtually all women’s individual rights. Upon a woman’s marriage, all of her property, regardless of whether it was earned or inherited, lawfully belonged to her spouse. This property even included the custody of her children. Wilson accurately describes the reality of women’s rights at the this time by asserting that the freedoms granted to married women “were on par with those of children and horses”. British Parliament initially enacted and upheld these laws not to directly suppress women, but rather to protect the unity of the marriage; after all, if two truly become one, then they should act as an individual unit rather than separate parties. Accordingly, appeal judge Lord Halsbury commented that the husband’s duty to uphold his marriage vows should be noted by a “due sense of delicacy and respect due to a wife whom the husband has sworn to cherish and respect”. However, the dominating tendency of man was not taken into consideration when constructing these laws. As a result, several women, who “had little redress if husbands refused to fulfil their side of the marriage bargain,” suffered at the hands of their husbands.

Caroline Norton, an educated woman and published author of the early 1800s, entered into an unhappy marriage at the age of nineteen. After a particularly big fight with her husband, Caroline’s husband, Richard Norton, placed their children in the care of his cousin and denied his wife access to them. Because of British law, Norton possessed “the power, without the decree of a court, to forbid his wife ever to see their children again.” Caroline, appalled at the discovery of her lack of rights, described the separation from her children as the most agonizing element of this ordeal: “What I suffered respecting those children God knows, and He only . . . .
I REALLY lost my young children – craved for them, struggled for them, was barred from them, and came too late to see one that died . . . except in his coffin.” 111 Thus, British laws regarding the renunciation of property arguably did more damage than good for marriage by injuring women and dividing families. In other words, the law forced women “to choose between being the abject slaves of a brutal husband or of being deprived of the very sight of their own children.” As a member of the House of Commons expressed:

As it stands at present the law is entirely in favour of the husband and oppressive to the wife. A man who may be drunken, immoral, vicious and utterly brutalized, may place his wife, who seeks to live separately from him, in this cruel dilemma – ‘You shall either continue to live with me, or you shall be deprived of your children’. 112

Due to several instances of male oppression such as that described above, advocates of the women’s rights movement sought legal reformation that would protect women within their marriage. Consequently, in 1839, the Infants Custody Act was passed, which granted mothers who were not found guilty of adultery custody of their children who were less than seven years of age, as well as personal contact with their older children. In 1925, the law was expanded, and women achieved “full and equal guardianship of their children.” 113 Furthermore, in 1882, the Married Women’s Property Act granted married women “the full right to separate ownership of property.” 114 These events mark significant achievements in the arduous journey for women’s rights. However, women, distrustful of the authority that only a century earlier condemned them to lives of virtual slavery, continued to push for rights that disregarded biological, psychological and spiritual truths.

The Modern Suspicion of Authority

Rather than encourage their husbands, sons, and brothers to live according to the ideals articulated by John Paul II, which would have included treating women as persons with equal dignity, feminists rejected these ideals altogether. These feminists viewed males, as well as
those in authority, as adversaries to their individual rights. Thus, they began to reject the institution of marriage, or from a Catholic understanding, a sacrament, that men had long violated by living and having sexual relations with partners rather than wives. Although feminists hoped to reestablish appreciation of womanhood by exercising their individuality, their efforts, stemming from a distrust of authority, only resulted in distancing themselves from that which John Paul II and Catholic Tradition teach is right and good. In the name of independence, the truths of the sanctity of marriage and the call for men to lead a virtuous life were rejected.

In the 20th Century, cohabitation and fornication became not only commonplace, but also socially acceptable. According to an American Community Survey conducted between 2005 and 2007, there were 12 million unmarried partners living together in the United States alone. However, several studies have shown that cohabitation does not strengthen, but rather damages, a couple’s relationship; in reality, divorce is 50% more likely for couples who choose to live together before marriage than those couples who live separately. Less than half of couples who cohabit actually marry, and for every ten couples who do marry, only the marriages of three of those couples will last longer than a decade. Furthermore, in engaging in a sexual relationship without a public, permanent commitment, the woman places herself in a very vulnerable position, and is much more likely to become a victim of abuse and unfaithfulness. In seeking happiness and independence outside of the Church’s laws regarding the sanctity of marriage, more and more women have encountered heartbreak.

The Catholic Church has long decried the practice of cohabitation for its detrimental effects on both the individual and the family. Without the “binding commitment” between the
man and woman that can only come through marriage, couples fail to experience the true nature of marriage; instead, couples who cohabitate often experience an “over-reliance on sexual expression” and fail to develop a relationship that depends on conversation and communication. However, because feminists consider the Church a limiting authority figure and one of the “social, religious, and political institutions of the West” responsible for the oppression of women, feminists have chosen to ignore the Church’s teachings and the truths that research has discovered so that they may live according to their desires and exercise their individual freedom. No woman, according to some feminists, should obey “any authority” that “may legitimately limit the freedom of the individual.” Thus, a person should first refer to his “subjective and changeable opinion or, indeed, his selfish interest and whim” when making decisions, rather than “the truth about good and evil.” In doing so, women have become slaves to their desires and have lost an appreciation for that which makes them beautiful.

The Crown of Creation and Original Unity

John Paul II vehemently argues against the subordination of women throughout history. Contrary to the common opinions of many in today’s society, this injustice starkly contrasts with the truths that are discovered in Sacred Scripture and embodied in fundamental Church teachings. For example, in the creation story found in the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis places woman as the “crown of creation.” In all four Gospel accounts, Christ treats women with a respect that would be considered revolutionary in the time of ancient Israel. Nevertheless, the truth of the equal dignity of man and woman has become clouded and unclear over time as a result of the effects of original sin. Because our minds and wills no longer have complete control over the desires of the flesh, women have suffered incredible hardships at the
hands of dominating men. This reality is not, however, how God had originally intended His creation.

In the beginning, the Book of Genesis relates, God creates the heavens, the earth, and everything found within and beyond it. Over the course of six days, He creates the land, the seas, the plants, the animals, and all things that increasingly reflect Himself. After each act of creation, God pronounces it “good.” 124 On the sixth day, God performs his final act of creation and forms man out of the dust of the earth. However, on this particular day, God does not follow the pattern that has unfolded of pronouncing His creation good; instead, God declares that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (emphasis added). To rectify this situation, God decides to “make a helper suitable for [Adam].” 125 This suitable helper becomes the first woman, who is given the name Eve.

God begins His creation of woman by placing Adam in a “deep sleep.” 126 While man is sleeping, God procures a rib from him and from it creates woman. Quite a few Biblical scholars have purported the belief that these events in the Book of Genesis discourage the equal dignity of man and woman. For instance, the Atheist Foundation of Australia comments, “Even before the fall woman is accorded inferior status by deliberately being created after Adam instead of being created together.” 127 In her essay about misogyny, women, and the devil, Michelle Zobel explains that because God created Eve not from dust but from Adam’s rib, woman is shown to be “merely a sub-creation of God”, or a “physical subordination”. Furthermore, because the rib is located beneath a man’s arm, Genesis supposedly teaches that “woman is underneath man forever, as that is how woman was created in the first place.” 128 Though initial readings seem to indicate misogynistic tendencies of the Biblical writers, a more thorough analysis of the Book of Genesis reveals startlingly contrasting truths about the relationship of men and women. In his
commentary on the Theology of the Body, Catholic author and speaker Christopher West explains how Pope John Paul II refutes these claims and clarifies how the Book of Genesis in actuality demonstrates the unique role that women fulfill in creation. “While some have thought [Genesis] demeans women,” West comments, “John Paul stresses that the biblical author intends to affirm the indispensable equality of the sexes and place it on a sure foundation.” 129

When others promote the belief of the inferiority of woman because she is the second gender that God creates, they fail to grasp the pattern of the creation story. Throughout the six days, God’s creation increases in complexity and beauty, building to “ever higher and higher works of art”. Woman, rather than being a secondary or subordinate act of creation, is in actuality “the crescendo, the final, astonishing work of God”. In light of the reality of God’s unique design of the universe, Stasi Eldredge questions, “Can there be any doubt that Eve is the crown of creation?” 130 Thus, the arrival of woman, rather than a sign of subordination, is a sign of beauty, of wonder, of triumph.

The fact that Adam is asleep during the creation of Eve also reveals the dignity of women. When God places Adam in a deep sleep, he is rendered unconscious and is unable to participate in this next act of creation. Man has no function in the creation of woman; therefore, she is solely the creation of God. As Christopher West explains, sleep “emphasizes the exclusivity of God’s action in the work of the creation of woman; the man had no conscious participation in it.” 131 Carl Anderson further asserts that because Adam was asleep, “Eve comes no less directly from God than Adam does.” 132 Adam’s lack of participation in the creative act demonstrates the primacy of God over all His creation and discourages the claim that religion has destined man to dominate woman.
The New Testament further confirms the equal dignity of man and woman. John Paul II asserts that Christ “treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness,” honoring the inherent worth that women “have always possessed according to God’s plan.” In fact, both the teachings and behavior of Jesus corroborate the belief in woman’s inherent goodness, which stands in contrast to the discrimination women experienced in his time and throughout much of history. During His public ministry, Jesus associated with several women, such as Martha, her sister, Mary, and Mary Magdalene, taking the time to care for their needs. He healed several women, such as the widow of Nain, the daughter of Jairus, and Peter’s mother-in-law, whose hemorrhage rendered her too impure to be touched in the Jewish culture. Most indicative of His profound respect for women, however, is Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery. In the midst of the scribes and Pharisees, men who sought to condemn and stone to death this woman who had transgressed God’s law, Jesus forgave and indeed, saved her life, admonishing men for committing adultery within their hearts. While Jesus does not dismiss the woman’s sin, encouraging her to live instead a life of virtue, His actions demonstrate a fundamental truth often overlooked by society. The woman’s public guilt points to an equal transgression committed by a man – a man who escapes both notice and responsibility for his sin. Christ reveals the double standard that society has established when addressing women’s sins, that a woman can be severely punished for a crime she does not and cannot commit alone. Moreover, Jesus, in his tenderness, unveils the “fundamental truth of [man’s] responsibility vis-à-vis woman,” that women above all deserve to be cherished and protected by men. Consequently, Christ sets the example for all men to follow. As women can “find in [Christ’s] teaching and actions their own subjectivity and dignity”, so too should all men strive for this transparency and tenderness in their own actions.
Finally, the New Testament demonstrates the immense dignity of women through the events of the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth. Because Jesus is both God and man, Jesus’ divine nature was fused with a human nature. This human nature came forth from the Blessed Virgin Mary, a woman. Through this act of God in His vast plan of salvation, He “manifests the dignity of women in the highest form possible, by assuming human flesh from the Virgin Mary.” Indeed, there is no greater honor for all of womanhood, who has begun the great task of receiving humanity, than to be entrusted by God with the care of His Son. The numerous manifestations of the dignity of woman within Christian teachings demonstrate God’s original plan for humanity, that man and woman stand before Him as equals. However, original sin shattered the fulfillment of this reality.

God’s original intent for humanity before the fall of Adam and Eve was for an interior unity subordinating bodily passions to reason, as well as a relational unity of communion between man and woman. This is known as original unity, or both the perfect integration of one’s body and soul and the perfect, reciprocal love between a man and a woman. Before the fall, the bodies of Adam and Eve were “under the rule of their minds and wills”, which signifies that the universal struggle against the desires of the flesh was unknown to them. Because the souls and the bodies of Adam and Eve were perfectly integrated, there was no fear of one person using the other selfishly. Indeed, because they could trust each other, they were free to love. Additionally, the second meaning of original unity refers to the “immense joy” of the “loving union” Adam and Eve achieved when they first met the other with whom they could engage in self-giving love. Upon meeting Eve, Adam realized that he had discovered she who was destined to be His spouse, the recipient of all His love. Rejoicing in this discovery, Adam exclaimed, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”
Unfortunately, original sin destroyed both senses of original unity. Adam and Eve were tempted to eat from the Tree of Knowledge because the serpent told them that they will become more like God. In an act of pride, Adam and Eve eat this fruit. However, instead of becoming more like God, they lose God’s gift of love and damage the perfect integration of their souls. Because Adam and Eve choose to follow their prideful desires rather than God’s law, their wills are no longer perfectly aligned towards goodness and truth, and perfect love becomes a struggle.

When man, woman, and the serpent receive their punishments for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, God tells woman, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Consequently, man has struggled throughout history with the temptation to dominate others and exert the power of force within personal relationships. While men suffer spiritually as a result of this struggle, it is woman, unfortunately, who has suffered physically and socially from this punishment ever since. However, God, in His mercy, does not abandon His children. Instead, He sends us His only Son so that, by turning to Him and trusting in His sacrificial love, His followers may attain the unity and salvation that original sin had destroyed.

**Jane Eyre’s Struggle with Male Domination**

Throughout Charlotte Brontë’s novel, Jane Eyre experiences much suffering at the hands of men. Even as a child, she is “bullied and punished” by her cousin, John Reed, by means so violent that blood is occasionally drawn. When she rebels against her mistreatment, she is sentenced to confinement in the Red Room, the room in which her uncle had died. The sufferings that Jane endures at Gateshead, such as the aforementioned solitary confinement and physical oppression, serve to reflect the “wider female oppression” of her culture. As the novel progresses, Jane struggles with her relationship to men as on more than one occasion she is offered that for which her heart has most earnestly longed: love. However, the acceptance of
such love often necessitates a denial of an important facet of her individuality, or the renunciation of values that she recognizes are a greater treasure than the fulfillment of her desires. Most notably, Jane’s decides to follow the religious laws regarding marriage rather than become Rochester’s mistress, despite her deep love for him. Furthermore, Jane refuses to comply with St. John’s demand that she become his wife in order to travel to India with him as a missionary, since there is no romantic love in their relationship. Jane’s refusal to submit to the selfish or controlling demands of both Rochester and St. John stands for the dignity of all women and demonstrates her profound trust that God’s authority, rather than her desires, will best guide her actions.

Rochester’s tendencies towards domination appear throughout the text, indeed, from his very first encounter with Jane. While traversing the English moor near Thornfield, her new residence as governess, Jane observes a man astride a horse dash past her, only to slip and tumble on the winter’s ice. Maintaining an enigmatic identity, the man requests her assistance, for he has sprained his ankle. Jane immediately responds to his wishes, feeling “disposed to obey.” Before departing the country road, he lifts himself onto his horse by placing a “heavy hand” upon hint her shoulder, explaining, “Necessity compels me to make you useful” (emphasis added). Thus, from the very beginning of Rochester and Jane’s relationship, Charlotte Brontë suggests that Rochester demonstrates an oppressive attitude towards females and a failure to recognize the dignity of women. Furthermore, he practices deception by withholding from her his true identity and, consequently, a clear view of his entire personhood. This deception, though less severe than the secret of his insane wife, nevertheless demonstrates his disregard for Jane’s right to the truth. Although Rochester eventually comes to view Jane as his equal who is entitled
to the truth, much of the novel portrays his journey towards this understanding, including his failures and shortcomings.

Rochester discloses his true identity when Jane receives an invitation to dinner from the master of Thornfield. It is here that Jane discovers that the man she had met on the English moor was indeed her employer. Over dinner, Rochester and Jane engage in a series of verbal debates, most notably about what constitutes the superiority of one person over another. When Rochester demands that Jane speak to him about a topic of her own choosing, Jane, expressing her unique personality, replies, “I don’t think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience.” 146 Jane’s response not only demonstrates the keenness of the female mind, but also the innocence of her individuality. It does not infringe upon the rights of others, but rather allows her to share her thoughts, beliefs, and indeed, her very self, with another. This sharing of oneself is a manifestation of the self-giving love to which all are called. 147 Furthermore, the content of her assertion corroborates the belief that men and women are fundamentally equal. Because individuals are placed within cultures and contexts that shape their knowledge, the passion with which they have dedicated themselves to their endeavors rather than the extent of their experiences should be the basis of their claims to superiority. Thus, the fact that life, according to her “wealth, class, and gender”, has placed Jane in a position with limited opportunities is by no means a ruler by which to measure a person’s worth; “regardless of customs and conventionalities”, men and women are equal in dignity. 148

Later in the novel, as Jane and Rochester prepare for their wedding, Jane is once again confronted with Rochester’s proclivity to overpower her individuality. Though Rochester’s
proposal of love is sincere, the weeks leading up to their marriage create a slow, downward spiral through which Jane’s independence begins to descend. Vigorously, she resists Rochester’s “increasingly possessive will” by refusing to allow him to “clasp the bracelets on [her] fine wrists” and “attire herself in satin and lace.” She recognizes that to do so would be to deny her very identity, her very self: “I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin’s jacket – a jay in borrowed plumes.” In “lavishing” these fortunes upon her, Rochester seeks to fashion his “fantasy projection of a lover”, an indication of the reality of Jane’s imminent function following the fallacious marriage. By resisting Rochester’s attempts to alter her identity to serve his personal tastes, Jane demonstrates the strength of womanhood that is necessary for a marriage based upon the equal dignity of the couple.

Jane Eyre further resists male domination through her interactions with St. John Rivers. St. John Rivers is described as “a domineering male character who is firmly convinced of God’s will for them both.” He loves a beautiful woman of his hometown, Rosamond Oliver, but her more provincial, worldly ways contrast with his dream of serving as a missionary in India, which he believes is his true vocation. When he meets Jane, he does not fall in love with her, but he sees in her the prospects of a good missionary wife, and consequently proposes. While Jane entertains and indeed accepts a future of service in India, she cannot accept his hand in matrimony, for she does not love him; vehemently, she describes her aversion to the concept of a loveless marriage:

He asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband’s heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock…he prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all…can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love, and know that the spirit was quite absent? No – such a martyrdom would be monstrous.

Jane realizes that because her vocation is to give of herself in love, to marry someone for admirable reasons that do not include love is to forsake that for which she was created.
Nevertheless, St. John continues to press his will upon her, even daring to claim that she must consent, for their marriage is, in His eyes, God’s will. He asserts, “God and nature intended you to be a missionary’s wife . . . you are formed for labor, not for love.” ¹⁵⁵ Though he disguises his intentions with religious language, St. John seeks not the entire person of Jane as a self-gift, but only her skills as a missionary. Lamonaca describes St. John’s “agenda . . . as a vehicle of masculine self-aggrandizement and domination”, an arrangement that Jane “ultimately rejects” because God, and not man, reveals to an individual his or her unique vocation. ¹⁵⁶ Thus, she opposes St. John’s claim, saying, “Oh, I will give my heart to God . . . You do not want it.” ¹⁵⁷

While Jane consistently resists the wills of domineering men, she also experiences occasions where they acknowledge her equal dignity. As the romance in the novel expands, Jane finds herself more and more attracted to the enigmatic Rochester. Despite his dominating tendencies, he appeals both to her sense of self-worth and desire to be loved, an appeal that stirs the deepest desires of her soul. On the fateful night that Bertha Mason sets Rochester’s bed afire, he expresses gratitude for her aid, acknowledging her dignity: “You have saved my life; I have a pleasure in owing you so immense a debt”. Rochester insists that they depart with a handshake of acknowledged equality, saying that Jane might go “but not without taking leave; not without a word or two of acknowledgement and good will.” ¹⁵⁸ Rochester realizes the depth of his indebtedness to his beloved Jane for having saved his life, and, therefore, comes to see Jane not merely as his servant, but as his equal. Thus, Jane feels not only significant, but respected, needed, loved. And indeed, Rochester’s own visible but silent affection for Jane, a poor, plain governess, augments her attachment to him; mysteriously, with fumbled words, he tells her, “I knew . . . you would do me good at some time; I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you; their expression and smile did not . . . strike delight to my very inmost heart for so
nothing." These events reveal to Jane the possibility of fulfilling her vocation to love while affirming her dignity as a human person, attracting Jane more and more to a future that includes Rochester.

Blanche Ingram’s arrival at Thornfield reveals Rochester’s attempt to stir jealousy within his employed governess. Blanche serves as an obvious foil to Jane; in addition to possessing great and incomparable beauty, she is of the same social and economic class as Rochester, and, therefore, is more suitable to be Rochester’s bride. Jane certainly realizes these unhappy facts. To attempt to expel any remaining romantic fantasies from her feminine mind, Jane paints two portraits, one of Blanche Ingram and the other of her own image, in order to convince herself of the utter impossibility of Rochester’s falling in love with her. Nonetheless, she cannot totally subdue her non-materialistic sense of self-worth; Jane, as she observes Rochester and the Ingrams talk and pass time, silently comments: “He is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine. . . I feel akin to him . . . though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart . . . that assimilates me mentally to him.” Again, Jane remains firm in her conviction that a person’s worth does not depend on external factors such as wealth or gender; rather, it lies within the very soul of the individual.

Rochester soon affirms Jane’s resilient, abiding tenet. As he discusses his impending marriage with Blanche Ingram, Jane breaks down in tears, lamenting her inevitable departure from Thornfield and the consequent loss of the dignity she has experienced within its walls. It is here at Thornfield that Jane has felt for the first time that she has not “been trampled on.” When Rochester protests against her necessary departure, Jane declares that she must leave, for she, though a female servant, possesses feelings like the rest of society and could not endure remaining after the marriage. In one of her most famous monologues, Jane cries:
Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty, and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you...it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal-as we are!  

Rochester soon assuages the anguish that Jane has here voiced. Only pages later, beneath the silver, cascading moonlight, Rochester dismisses Jane’s notions of his impending marriage to Blanche Ingram. Instead, he draws her to his arms, saying, “You – I love as my own flesh”, words that echo Adam’s joyous cry upon discovering Eve. Indeed, the joy that the couple experiences mirrors the joy of Adam and Eve, the joy that comes through the unity of the intimate knowledge of man and woman. Rochester further begs her, “You . . . small and plain, as you are – I entreat you to accept me as a husband.”  

Rochester, knowing too well his beloved Jane, appeals to both her need for love and demand for the acknowledgement of her self-worth. It is significant to note that he does not command her to marry him, but rather requests her acceptance, playing the part of the inferior. While Jane most readily accepts his proposal of marriage, she does not realize that Rochester has ulterior motives. She believes that Rochester desires her as a man desires a wife; however, she is not aware that he is already married, or that he seeks to transform her into both his mistress and his redeemer from the depths of despair. Rochester’s mixed motivations demonstrate the havoc that original sin has wreaked upon the human soul and its capability to love.

With the arrival of Jane’s wedding day commences the climax of the arduous battle between Jane’s desire to give of herself completely in love and to be recognized for her inherent worth as a woman, and her desire to live a life that fulfills her vocation as a woman. She is forced to discern whether her love for Rochester will lead her towards the perfection of her “autonomy of spirit” or will become an “idolatrous love” that will destroy her integrity.
From the shadows of the darkened chapel comes the harrowing declaration, “Mr. Rochester has a wife now living” – an affirmation that sends Jane to explore in tumultuous grief the “darkest regions of the self.” In utter despair she retires to her bedroom, conscious of her “blooming” hopes and wishes of yesterday now laying like “chill, livid corpses, that could never revive.” She believes their passionate love is gone forever, yet when she finally stumbles from her bedroom door, she finds a beleaguered Edward Rochester patiently awaiting her egress who, catching her feeble body, earnestly pleads for her forgiveness and her continued love. However, there are strings attached to Rochester’s plea: Jane must live with him as his mistress, for in his eyes, adultery is the only means by which their love can survive.

**Freedom Through Faith**

As discussed previously, freedom is not merely the ability to choose as one pleases. Rather, freedom involves an active pursuit for truth as one grows in goodness. Authority, therefore, is not a hindrance to one’s freedom if the authority exists as a guide towards the integrity of the individual. Furthermore, love, or giving of oneself to another, in both marriage and participation in the community is an exercise of freedom. When one loves another, he concerns himself with the welfare of others and desires to serve their needs. This increasing selflessness frees oneself from becoming a slave to his passions, and allows one to grow in goodness. Thus, both authority and love can be aids on one’s faith journey. If authority can direct one towards integrity and love and help one to grow in goodness, a person can more easily discover Christ, since, for the Christian, the pursuit of goodness is in actuality the pursuit of Goodness Himself. When society works together to achieve goodness, then it is truly free.

Early in the novel, when Rochester explains his desire for love while dismissing God’s authority, Jane responds by saying such happiness “will sting – it will taste bitter.” Jane
recognizes that God leads His children towards Himself, and that a dismissal of His authority could be dangerous to the welfare of their souls. Furthermore, she cautions him against approbating an action that is generally thought immoral: “The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely intrusted . . . that of saying any strange, unsanctioned line of action, ‘Let it be right’.” 170 This same voice of reason returns to Jane in her moment of need and imparts to her this same truth, that gaining what she most desires may not be the path to happiness, that true freedom does not necessarily entail the denial of a divine authority.

Initially, Jane’s wearied soul does not vehemently refuse the vulgar proposition, for her passionate love blazes yet in her heart, urging her to comply with his wishes. Yet as their dialogue unfolds, Jane is forced to see the stark veracity of abidance to Rochester. He himself admits hatred of the memories of his mistresses, saying, “hiring a mistress . . . [is] often by nature, and always by position, inferior; and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading.” 171 To Jane, whose heightened sense of self has always been an essential element of her character, these words awaken her independent spirit, her supreme sense of self-worth, and urge her to comply with the “intolerable duty” of departure. 172

As Jane struggles with this heartrending decision, it is highly significant to note from where she garners the necessary strength to resist his passion. It is not from “Conscience” or “Reason”, for they “turned traitors against [her]”; neither is it out of love for him, for “feeling” “clamored wildly”, saying “Oh, comply!” 173 Rather, Jane remains unwavering in her rejection of Rochester’s plea because she recognizes that there is “something more important to her than pleasing those whom she loves, or giving satisfaction to those who love her,” 174 and that is adherence to her character and to the principles “given by God, sanctioned by man.” 175 Jane
comes to realize that accepting Rochester’s request, while fulfilling her immediate desires, would result in the death of her integrity and in a severe transgression of God’s law. As Emily Griesenger notes, “There are two good reasons Jane cannot finally agree to Rochester’s proposal that she live with him as his ‘true bride,’…the first is God’s law; the second is her own integrity and self-respect.” ¹⁷⁶ Freedom, Jane recognizes, is not the ability to do whatever one pleases. Rather, “freedom finds its fullest expression and meaning when we make of ourselves a gift to others. And this will entail, on more occasions than not, doing things that go against our personal desires.” ¹⁷⁷ In the case of Jane Eyre, following her desires, rather than God’s statutes, would transform her into a slave to her passions and provide men with the opportunity to use her for their own desire. Indeed, Jane’s turbulent emotions indicate a lack of unity between body and soul and disturb her ability to employ her reason in her decision-making; instead, she turns to God and His laws. Accordingly, Jane asserts:

Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments . . . when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigor; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? ¹⁷⁸

Jane understands that in order to be most fully herself, she must follow the will of her Creator, who knows her more intimately than any human ever will. Following His will rather than her own proves to be extremely difficult, for it entails “an active…decision to renounce, however painful, the thing she most ardently desires – Rochester’s love”, for it “stands between Jane and her ‘hope of heaven’. “ ¹⁷⁹ Thus, Jane’s departure from Thornfield and her beloved Rochester is not only her response to Rochester’s plea, but also her answer to the conflict between love and personal dignity with which she has been struggling her entire life: it is only when one turns to God that true love and freedom can be found.
Furthermore, it is Jane’s steadfast adherence to God’s will that enables her to reject the proposal of St. John. St. John tells Jane, “Do not forget that if you reject it [my proposal], it is not me you deny, but God…refuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself forever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity.” Her personal relationship with God is so genuine and sacred, however, that only she herself can discern His unique plan for her; the domineering opinion of a self-serving man, therefore, is subordinate to that which she discerns herself. As Emily Griesenger notes, “She is willing to submit to God’s will, but she must determine that will for herself.” While Jane’s discernment may be likened to the individualistic and isolating sense of freedom purported by modern feminists, one forgets that Jane Eyre makes her decisions not in isolation, but with Another in mind: God. Indeed, if God is the creator of all and knows each person’s needs and desire more intimately than any human being, it seems logical for one to make decisions according to His word. Though immediately averse to St. John’s proposal of marriage, Jane seriously considers it, begging God for clarity of His will: “Show me – show me the path, I entreated of Heaven.” As she further weighs this proposal, Jane consistently demonstrates her desire to please God and follow His will: “I could decide if I were but certain…that it is God’s will I should marry you. I could vow to marry you here and now – come afterward what would!” Nevertheless, because of her solitary childhood, Jane knows that she was created not merely for work, however commendable, but rather, to love, an active reality that cannot be fulfilled through marriage with St. John. God grants her this clarity in one of the more Gothic, supernatural events of the book. Across the English moor, Jane hears the voice of Edward Rochester calling her name: “Jane! Jane! Jane!” She breaks away from St. John to return to Rochester, all the while saying, “My spirit is willing to do what is right; and my flesh, I hope, is strong enough to accomplish the will of Heaven, when once that will is distinctly
known to me.”  It is significant to note that Jane does not immediately assume that returning to Rochester is God’s will; however, she chooses to pursue this path, hoping that whatever lies at its end, she will have the strength to remain committed to righteousness and truth. Most importantly, however, Jane demonstrates that throughout the decisions she makes and the paths she chooses to follow, God’s will reigns supreme in her mind and heart. God’s will is more essential to her happiness than the wishes of others or her own personal desires, for God, who is loving and true, knows best what will fulfill the desires of her heart while affirming her worth as His daughter. In the words of John Paul II, “the dignity and vocation of women…find their eternal source in the heart of God.”

Several modern feminists who read Jane Eyre point out the peculiarity of the novel’s conclusion and its seeming message regarding what is necessary for a woman to achieve equality with a man in a marriage. At the end of the novel, Jane possesses a wealth of her own; meanwhile, Rochester has become blind and crippled after fire has ravaged his Thornfield estate. Several critics have interpreted Rochester’s fate as a kind of “feminization” that “challenges (or compensates for) the differences of power and authority inscribed into gender inequality” and allows Jane to enter into an equal relationship. Feminist philosophies, however, have heavily influenced this interpretation. Rochester’s trials and consequent sufferings are not merely inventions of the author to make their relationship equal. Rather, Rochester suffers these trials to atone for his past mistakes, to purify his intentions before Jane returns, and to recognize the supremacy of God in their future marriage. Indeed, this interpretation aligns with the concern for sin of which Charlotte Brontë, the daughter of a minister, was assuredly aware.

Before Rochester discloses the existence of his secret wife, readers learn that just as Jane yearns for love, Rochester yearns for happiness, specifically for salvation from his past sins.
However, he believes this is only possible by gaining the freedom to love, no matter the ramifications it may have upon his or Jane’s soul. Indeed, Rochester turns to Jane, not God, for salvation; she becomes not a mediator, but an idol that separates him from God. He desires to make Jane his “angel”, his “comforter”, his antidote against the punishment due to his past sins. His understanding of freedom reflects that of the modern feminist, who believes that independence, regardless of its effect upon others, is the primary goal of one’s life. Rochester’s desire, however, is in direct contrast with Jane’s unshakable sense of self, for she insists, “I am not an angel . . . and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself.”  

Though Rochester experiences immense joy upon Jane’s acceptance of his proposal, which has finally quenched the thirst of his battered heart, he realizes the utter gravity of his decision. Throughout the night, he reiterates rationalizations of his deceptive act, saying, “it will atone” and “God pardon me . . . I have her, and will hold her.” The chapter ends as Jane learns of the fate of the horse-chestnut tree, beneath which Rochester professed his ardent love. Due to a lightning strike, half of it is split away, an ominous foreboding of the wedding that tears the two lovers asunder.

The immense suffering that Rochester endures after his accident at Thornfield slowly softens His heart and turns him away from His selfish desires and instead towards Him who desires the good and salvation of all His people. Rochester, in part inspired by Jane’s example, comes to recognize that it is in adherence to God’s will and His laws that true freedom and joy lie. After Jane returns to him, he confesses:

My heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent God of this earth just now. He sees not as man sees, but far clearer; judges not as man judges, but far more wisely. I did you wrong; I would have sullied my innocent flower…the Omnipotent snatched it from me. I, in my stiff-necked rebellion, almost cursed the dispensation; instead of bending to the decree, I defied it. Divine justice pursued its course; disasters came thick upon me; I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty; and one smote me which has humbled me forever….Of late…I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilement to my
Maker. I began sometimes to pray; very brief prayers they were, but very sincere... you know I was proud of my strength; but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance? 189

As Rochester suffers and experiences remorse for his sins, He grows in His relationship with God. Indeed, Rochester’s repentance illustrates the truth that only God can heal and restore the unity of man’s body and soul. He comes to value Jane’s immense worth as a woman and as an individual so that he no longer only acknowledges her equality, but also desires to serve her and protect her purity. Thus, Rochester no longer primarily desires “anything selfishly from the other, but rather seeks the good of the other person.” 190

Nevertheless, it is not until Jane returns to His side that Rochester is able to “fully recognize God’s love and mercy.” 191 He had been willing to lead a life of quiet suffering for the rest of his earthly existence, accepting that a future with Jane would only subsist in his wildest dreams. When she returns, he initially cannot believe that she is truly present. “What delusion has come over me?” he cries. “What sweet madness has seized me?” 192 However, upon realizing that Jane is no phantom come to tantalize him, Rochester offers a prayer of thanksgiving: “I thank my Maker that in the midst of judgment he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto!” 193 Rather than use the other selfishly to fulfill the deepest longings of their hearts, Jane and Rochester entrust their dreams, their desires, their very futures to God, and are rewarded with the joy and love that only He can bring. By previously refusing to become Rochester’s lover, Jane is “graciously honored by God’s dealings with Rochester, who, having been refined by fire physically, morally, and spiritually, can now be Jane’s partner...before a loving and holy God.” 194

Conclusion
Throughout the centuries, women have been the victims of much oppression and abuse. They have suffered limitations in education and the workforce, and have endured the dominating tendencies of man within marriage and within law. However, the response of the modern feminist, in her efforts to rectify and atone for these crimes, spurned the true meaning of womanhood. In her pursuit of freedom, woman denied key fundamental truths regarding the nature of humanity and femininity, such as the necessity of community and recognition of a divine authority as a means for attaining freedom. She believed that by isolating herself from others and by doing as she pleases, woman could attain freedom. In his numerous writings, Pope John Paul II has addressed the long-standing oppression women have experienced and has advocated the advancement of women in society. However, he embraces the feminine genius while also embracing the key truths about humanity. Recognizing that the universal vocation for all humanity as evidenced in the Book of Genesis is to love, John Paul II celebrates the beauty of human solidarity and the unique position in which God has placed women in His plan of creation, that of entrusting to her the human person. He explains that due to original sin, perfection and holiness are constant struggles, but it is by turning to Christ and to His laws that humanity can find ultimate freedom from becoming slaves to that which would turn us from goodness.

The title character of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is a paradigm of the vision of John Paul II. Through her commendable behavior, Jane becomes a shining example of the importance of recognizing the inestimable worth of oneself and remaining true to the principles established by God. She demonstrates a truth of universal import to both Rochester and her readers: if one is to consent freely to the plea, “come to me”, one must possess more than mere desire, for freedom demands much more than the ability to do whatever one wants. True freedom entails
a vision centered not upon oneself, but upon God. It is only when one is united by love with others in the heart of God that genuine freedom can flourish.
Notes


13. Lewis, 91.


18. Lewis, 86.

19. Ibid, 84-5.

20. Ibid, 90.


23. Lewis, 170.

24. Ibid, 186.


26. Lewis, 156.

27. Ibid, 88.

29. Lewis, 164.


31. Lewis, 164.

32. Ibid, 197.


35. Lewis, 76.


38. Fox-Genovese, 9.


40. Fox-Genovese, 7.

41. Lewis, 88.


43. Tasha Kheiriddin, "Feminism's second-wave hangover," National Post, (Canada) March 8, 2011.

45. Lewis, 90.

46. Gn. 1:26


48. Gn. 1:26


50. Ibid, 74.


52. Gn 2:18.

53. Hogan, 45.


56. Hogan, 245.


59. Hogan, 114.

60. Ibid, 244.

61. Ibid, 111.

62. Ibid, 244.
63. Ibid. 245.

64. Elizabeth Wurstel, “1% Wives Are Helping Kill Feminism and Make the War on Women Possible”, *The Atlantic*, (USA), June 15, 2012.


67. Brontë, 1.

68. Ibid, 11.

69. Kaplan, 3.

70. Brontë, 25.

71. Ibid, 36.

72. Ibid, 75.


74. Brontë, 286.

75. Ibid, 406.

76. Ibid, 413; 431.

77. Ibid, 450.

78. Ibid, 447.

79. Kaplan, 12.

80. Brontë, 96
81. Ibid, 140.
82. Ibid, 158.
83. Ibid, 475.
84. Ibid, 153.
85. Ibid 122.
86. Ibid, 94.
89. Brontë, 94.
90. Bell, 265.
91. Brontë, 203.
92. Ibid, 295.
93. Ibid, 293.
94. Ibid, 122.
96. Brontë, 518.
98. Ibid.


101. Wilson, 369.


103. Hollis, 200.

104. Wilson, 473.

105. Ibid., 308.


107. Wilson, 305.

108. Ibid, 369.

109. Lewis, 120.

110. Wilson, 305.

111. Ibid, 306.


113. Wilson, 306.

114. Ibid, 248.

116. Evert, 221.


118. Evert, 221.


120. Fox-Genovese, 5.

121. Alvaré, 3.

122. Eldredge, 25.

123. Mulieris Dignatatem, 12.


125. Gn. 2:18


130. Eldredge, 25.

131. West, 74.


135. Ibid, 14.

136. Familiaris Consortio, 22.

137. Hogan, 48.

138. Ibid, 47.

139. Gn. 2:23.

140. Hogan, 52.

141. Gn. 3:16.

142. Brontë , 4.

143. Nestor, 53.

144. Brontë, 129.

145. Ibid, 130.

146. Ibid, 153.

147. West, 81.


149. Blom, 97.

150. Brontë, 300-1.

151. Ibid., 301.

152. Nestor, 62.

153. Lamonaca, 250 .

154. Brontë, 471.
155. Ibid, 468.
156. Lamonaca, 245.
158. Brontë, 173.
159. Ibid, 175.
160. Brontë, 201.
161. Ibid, 293.
162. Ibid, 294.
163. Ibid, 296.
165. Berg, 84.
166. Brontë, 338.
168. Brontë, 344.
169. Ibid, 155.
171. Ibid, 362.
172. Ibid, 367.
173. Brontë, 368.
175. Brontë, 368.
176. Griesenger, 49.


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179. Lamonaca, 255.

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181. Griesenger, 52.

182. Brontë, 487.

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184. Ibid, 489.


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190. Hogan, 49.

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