

Melanie Frei

President's Report

January 15, 2022

I am a member of a Great Books club that meets once a month in La Crosse. In January, our reading was the Introduction to The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir, a 20th century French philosopher who influenced the modern women's liberation movement. Throughout history women have unquestionably been oppressed in numerous ways, many of which came up in the Great Books discussion. Thankfully, there has been significant progress. But while I fully support equal rights for women in civil, legal, and financial matters, I cannot support Simone de Beauvoir's method to bring about equality. Her idea was to erase the significant differences between men and women.

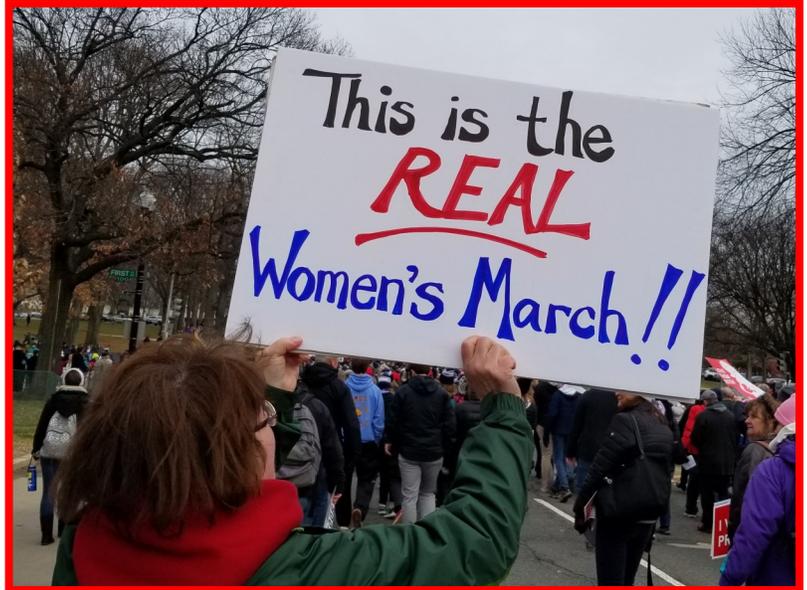
She believed that the only way for women to be truly free is to reject the imprisonment found in the institution of marriage and the care of children. She advocated free love and had numerous affairs while maintaining a life-long relationship with the existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre. She had no children of her own but adopted a 37-year-old woman whom she made the sole executor of her will.

Having rejected the Catholic faith at an early age, Simone lived her life as an atheist. It should come as no surprise that she was an early advocate of abortion on demand. She continues to inspire and influence young women to demand this pillar of radical feminism: without the right to abortion, women can never be equal to men. I heard these very words several years ago from a young relative of mine.

As you might imagine, the book generated significant controversy. Some of the non-Christians seconded Simone's attack on marriage as a form of slavery and also attacked the "patriarchal Catholic Church" which continues to oppress women by not allowing them into the priesthood. My husband argued that Christian marriage elevated the status of women because husband and wife were both held to the same standard: "You shall not commit adultery," and that legalized abortion has produced a generation of playboys who avoid the "Love and Responsibility" required of mature men.

Throughout the evening, I kept asking myself: Why don't I feel oppressed? Why don't I have this anger and frustration? Why don't I feel unequal to men? After the discussion, I wondered: Why couldn't I think of good arguments to counter Simone's false philosophy. As usual, I always think of the best things to say several days later! When I am agitated, I sit down and start to write out my thoughts, get them out of my head, and capture some of what I wish I would have said. Here are some of my musings...

...and maybe I'll be more ready next time to share the incredible blessing I have as a Catholic woman!



March For Life January 2020

Ten reasons why I am not oppressed by the Catholic Church

by Melanie Frei

1) I have the same dignity and worth before God as my male counterparts. My faith teaches that God created man in His image...male and female He created them. I am different from my husband. But since both of us have been created in God's image, we are equals.

These days many define equality as *same-ness*: If you are not the *same*, you are not equal. I never think any two people are the *same*, but I certainly believe we all have equal worth and dignity. While our society is all about conflict between sexes, the Church is all about complementarity.

2) God commands men and women: You shall not commit adultery. We don't have one rule for men and another for women. There is no double standard. This is a huge protection for me.

3) In God's plan, the marriage relationship takes precedence over any other relationship, including a man and his parents. The Bible says that in marriage, a man leaves his father and mother, cleaves to his wife, and the two become one flesh.

When a group of college women in China heard about this teaching at an underground Bible study led by a friend of mine, they were astounded...and amazed that God would design marriage like that. In Chinese culture, the daughter-in-law is the bottom of the totem pole in the family structure, not only under the husband's parents, but also under any male sons. But our God wants wives to get first place in their husbands' heart.

4) The New Testament is clear that a Christian man can have only one wife. We all know that men, in Old Testament times, practiced polygamy, and for Abraham, David, and Solomon, this ended badly. When I lived in Niger, Africa, I found out that Muslim men could legally have up to four wives.

Now I ask you, if the wives had a choice between being one of four wives to a husband or having a husband completely committed to her alone (and their children), which do you think she would choose? I am thankful that the Church protects me from polygamous marriage.

5) The Bible begins with a marriage and ends with a wedding feast. Throughout Scripture, marriage is constantly used as an "icon" or image of the love between God and His chosen people Israel (Old Testament) and the love between Christ and His Church (New Testament). Christ is the bridegroom. His bride is the Church.

The union of man and woman in marriage is a mystery because it conceals, as in a parable, a truth about Christ and the church. The divine reality hidden in the metaphor of marriage is that God ordained a permanent union between His Son and the church. Human marriage is the earthly image of this divine plan. As God willed for Christ and the church to become one body (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13), so He willed for marriage to reflect this pattern—that the husband and wife become one flesh (Gen. 2:24).

Quote from: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-metaphor-of-christ-and-the-church>

Those who harshly criticize the Church because women are not allowed to be priests completely fail to understand this mystery. God did not ordain that men should be priests because they were better, superior, or more important than women. He didn't do it to oppress women and "keep them in their place." Those who think so have very little understanding of or trust in God's love.

In God's plan, a priest at the altar stands "in persona Christi," meaning in the person of Christ. If a woman were to stand at the altar, where is the groom? Clearly, the icon of the marriage between Christ and his Church would be lost. I am thankful for the integrity of the Church which insists on holding to this mystery amid continual disparagement.

6) The Church honors women. Mary is held up as the perfect example of a disciple of Christ. If you want to know how a disciple thinks and how they live their faith, you need look no farther than Mary. Complete faith...complete trust...complete humility...perfect discipleship.

There are many amazing women who are recognized by the Church as saints. Rich, poor, young, old, uneducated, paragons of wisdom. Several women are esteemed as "Doctors of the Church." One of them even stood up to a Pope and told him to get back to Rome where he belongs. Some women founded and led religious orders, and some attained holiness as wives and mothers. They proved their courage on the front-lines of cultural battle fields. And the Church joyfully acknowledges them! I am thankful for these great role models.

7) The first biblical statement of the Gospel prophesied that a woman would crush the head of the serpent. Because of Mary's willingness to cooperate with God's plan of salvation, the Church gives her the title of "Co-Redemptrix."

8) "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her." Scripture is very clear on how a husband is to treat his wife. Which of the world religions commands men to sacrifice themselves out of love for their wives? (Think of the men on the Titanic.) Does this not elevate women in an extraordinary way? Scripture commands that husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies...how better can I be loved?

9) Wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord. Does this mean we should cower and expect to be treated as a doormat? If you read the whole text instead of cherry picking a few words, I am to submit to my husband... [how?]...as to the Lord. Do I find submission to Christ irritating...frustrating...like my freedom is gone and I'm in a cage? Absolutely not. I submit to Christ because I know He loves me beyond all measure, and I submit to my husband who strives to love me as Christ loved the Church.

Also, this particular passage begins with another important instruction: "all of you, *submit to one another* in Christ." Wives to husbands and husbands to wives. I'm sick and tired of hearing half a text, quoted out of context, being used as a bludgeon to disparage the Church.

10) I have more opportunities for service than I could ever hope for. I'm not going to stand before God with a list of complaints and criticisms about what He prevented me from doing by creating me as a female. I want to be judged on my faithfulness to what He did call me to do. This is the source of my ultimate joy and fulfillment. This is how I become the best version of myself. I want to hear Him say to me, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."