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The Complementarity of Women and Men (with Paul Vitz)

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Paul Vitz is the Professor Emeritus of Psychology at New York University. He is a Catholic scholar, whose work explores the relationship between psychology and Christian faith. He has recently edited a book, 'The Complementarity of Women and Men: Philosophy, Theology, Psychology & Art' (<https://amzn.to/3gkFpoi>), with contributions from some leading Catholic voices in the conversation: J Budziszewski, Sr Prudence Allen, Deborah Savage, and Elizabeth Lev. He joins me to discuss the book and the differences and relation between the sexes more generally.

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Transcript

Hello and welcome. I am joined today by Paul Vitz, who is the author of, or the editor of, a recent book called The Complementarity of Women and Men, Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, and Art. It's a delight to have you with me today.

It's great to be here and to meet you, Alastair. I'd love to hear a bit about what prompted you to edit this book and to just give us an outline of what the book is about. Well, obviously the whole issue of the nature of the sexes has been a big issue in the culture for quite some time.

And as people started moving toward the notion that, you know, there were about a

hundred different sexes and things of that kind, you know, you began to wonder whether people were losing their common sense. And so I got very interested in complementarity because of that and discovered a number of people also were interested in the same thing. And when we discussed it, we saw we had a way of integrating all of our positions into a single volume.

So that's what this book is. It's five chapters with different perspectives, but it is pretty carefully integrated. And so I enjoyed working on it and doing the psychology part, the psychology and a little bit of the neuroscience.

The lead article is by Sister Mary Prudence Allen, and it's really very, very important. Of course, she's Catholic as the name implies, but she's written a three-volume work on the history of women. The first volume on, I think, classical history of women, then women up until about the modern period for the second volume and third volume, history of women in the modern period or relatively modern period.

And I think it's very open to Protestants. In fact, it's published by Erdmann's. I've got the series.

It's incredible. You know, hardly a Catholic press, but it's a very scholarly work and very much, I think, in keeping with the way in which Christians of all denominations today are rallying around our Lord and doing battle with the critiques out there. But anyway, she has the first major chapter.

We have an introduction first in philosophy from a philosopher called J. Budashevsky, who's down at the University of Texas. Then comes gender reality versus gender ideology by Mary Prudence, Sister Mary Prudence. Then after that, we have Woman and Man by Deborah Savage, and she's a theologian and a philosopher, does a very good job of introducing some of the Catholic philosophical support for complementarity.

And of course, we all know, I guess, that complementarity is deeply rooted even in the book of Genesis, so that most of the scriptural interpretations and things that are brought out are familiar to all of us, even to Jews, of course, for whom Genesis is foundational. Then the next chapter is on Michelangelo and his Sistine Chapel, and this is by Elizabeth Lev, who's at the Vatican Museum, and she points out some very remarkable things that Michelangelo did in the Sistine Chapel of all places, where he pointed out the complementarity of men and women. And one of the ways he did this was by painting not just the genealogy of Jesus, as it would be listed as the father and the father and the father, he also painted the mothers, because he knew you weren't going to have a child and a family, not just with the father, you needed the mother.

And even though the mothers were very infrequently mentioned in scripture by name, he would paint them. And so that was the first time many of these women, the supposed, you know, presumably the wives of these important prophets had been

painted. So it's a very nice complementarity in terms of all places in the Sistine Chapel, which could be considered one of the most patriarchal places in the world.

And so there's the complementarity with all the mothers of these, of these ancestors of our Lord, along with the fathers. And so that's where the art comes in. And then my chapter, as I said, is on psychology and neuroscience.

And it's all put together. My chapter doesn't have much to say, it doesn't have a, especially theological path, except to accept the theological position. It's mostly, you know, experiments, evidence from psychology, evidence from brain science, and so forth.

So we've used the word complementarity so far. I'd be interested to hear you give a more theological unpacking of what you mean by that term, and maybe elaborate a bit upon the concept. Well, what I understand complementary to be, it's something like this.

If men have virtues and things that are positive, so they would, let's say they have 10 units of it. And let's say women have 10 units of virtue and positive things. Complementarity implies when you put men and women together, then 10 times 10 is the result, that is you multiply, you get something that neither one by itself could have contributed.

And the simplest case of that, of course, is a child. Men can't produce a child by themselves, nor can a woman. And you put them together and you have this miraculous new human being.

In many ways, it's an expression of what we mean when we talk about the man and the woman being one flesh. The child is the most concrete expression of that union. Absolutely.

And it comes from the complementarity of the two contributions. Each contributes half. Each contributes half that together form this new remarkable being.

And so complementarity therefore has a kind of synthetic contribution that comes from it. And I think that happens also in the family, that the contributions on average of men and women to family life are rather different. But together they make a more, not just successful family, they make the whole notion of the tradition of the family, of the generations possible.

And so in general, women are the interpersonal experts. They're the ones who make sure you get fed and changed and loved and hugged and all of that. And men do a lot about bringing in resources from the outside, making sure there's protection, making sure that there's enough there to take care of.

There's enough food, there's enough, there's a house so that the winds don't blow you

down and the rain doesn't drown you, and things of that kind. So the combination is, I think, you know, terrifically filled with generative power. And that's the complementarity.

Within her writing on the subject, Sister Prudence Allen elaborates, dividing some of the different elements of this into equal dignity, significant difference, synergetic relation, and intergenerational fruition. I'd be interested to hear you elaborate on that. That's something I if I remember correctly, you picked up in your own article.

You just nailed it. Okay, the first principle is equal dignity. Very, very important.

Sister Mary Prudence emphasizes that, but I think we can all say, you know, we have equal moral dignity and significance, because we were both created by God in the image of God. And perhaps in a certain sense, together we image God more fully as a, you know, as a complementary pair, men and women. But after the notion of equal dignity comes, there are significant differences.

And it's not that there isn't overlap. There are tall women and there are short men. We all know that.

And there, you know, there are some smart women and some pretty dumb men and all of that. We all know that, too. We know all sorts of things about abstract thinking.

Although we know some men are pretty, aren't bad at interpersonal relationships. But you know, a lot of them are pretty clueless. So the complementarity, so the differences are there.

And all cultures have recognized this. Anthropologists have shown that every culture in the world makes a distinction between men and women of some kind, and it shows up in their behavior in the society. And that's true of all of them.

So that makes it make sense. And of course, nobody had thought it didn't make sense until maybe recently. And now when we've lost our senses, why that can happen.

But anyway, so we have significant differences with overlap, keeping in mind the overlap. So, but together they provide something called synergy. That's the language used by Sister Mary Prudence.

I said things like, you know, complementarity or creating something new or the multiplication effect. But synergy is the new thing that they create. And of course, I mentioned that already, the family, they create the child, the family and the generations of the family that make us all part of, you know, at least three generations in most of our lives.

Is that? Yes. We're looking for. Yeah.

I think we can maybe think about the sort of synergetic relation, just on the analogy with

the body that you have difference and things that are opposed to each other for the sake of each other. And think about the way in which we have two arms and hands in order that we'll be able to handle the world more effectively or two eyes to see things in perspective or two feet so that we can actually walk effectively. And it seems to me often we think about the differences in a more competitive way and don't actually focus upon the idea of this synergetic relation that we are different not just from each other, but different for each other or each other.

Absolutely. And every time I feel stiff and can't reach down in my wife, whose body is much more limber than mine, not just because I'm old, but women's bodies are more limber and less rigid. Men's bodies are more rigid, but they're also very strong and hard to move, but they're not very flexible, even physically.

And so when I have to pick something off the floor, it's a delight. I don't have to bend down there and creep myself into a cramped position and my wife, Timmy, just stoops down, picks up quickly. And sometimes I can pick something off the shelf that's a little tall for her.

But all of this is part of complementarity. And it's always nice to have another head. We don't each have two heads, but if you have a good wife, you have one working for you and you have one, I hope, working for her.

That's like the two arms. That's very much being able to see the world with a new perspective. I think often you mentioned the way we can see people who are smart and people who aren't.

And what we find, I think, often with the relationship between the sexes is it's a different way of experiencing and perceiving the world. It's not just a matter of more or less, it's a matter of just as your right or left eye see things from different vantage points and together they can see the whole in a way that they could not by themselves. So bringing together male and female, we can see things about the world and about ourselves that would not otherwise be clear to us.

Look, absolutely. I'll give a funny example. I was having a discussion in class and we had male and female psychologists there and also some graduate students.

And I was talking about Dr. Kevorkian, who was sometimes called Dr. Death. And I was talking about his history and how it turns out he comes out of the Armenian genocide through his mother's life. But I showed the, he did some artwork, Kevorkian did, and he had a gallery in Michigan.

And I got a hold of the gallery brochure and the pictures were terrifyingly sort of mad and horrifying. And I was showing them to the class as an example of this man's really, his preoccupation with death and things like that. And one of the female

psychotherapists, her response was, oh my, how much he had, must have been suffering and how much help he needed.

And that just struck me because I'd always just said, well, he's an enemy. And he's somebody I'm opposed to. But the idea that one should be concerned with his, that one should reach out in some kind of supporting and basically maternal and helpful way had never occurred to me.

In that sense, I was interpersonally clueless. That what he needed was not a criticism, not hostility to his position, but perhaps love that could in some way help him overcome the great preoccupation with death that had been transferred to him from his mother who had experienced the Armenian genocide personally by the beheading of the members of her own family in front of her. So again, there I was in a person, I'm a psychologist and I was in a personally incompetent at recognizing that in a sense, these pictures were not just a support for his position.

They were a cry of, for help. So that's where. I wonder when we're talking about the differences between men and women, often the response is people's hackles come up and there's a sense of feeling threatened, and particularly the way that differences have often been used in an implicit way, even to denigrate one sex or the other.

And often it can be a matter, I think, of misunderstanding the ways that people are talking about differences. The other thing is the struggle to speak well about differences that are very, they're clearly discernible. We all know that there are these differences.

And as you mentioned, these differences cross cultures. If you go to any single culture, and I'm trying to remember who it is, who points this out. If you went to any culture in the world and you mixed up the men and the women before you went into the room, and then you saw them living their lives, you would notice fairly instantly that there had been something very strange occurring because men and women are discernible in any particular context.

And even though we have very different ways of expressing the differences between men and women in terms of dress styles, in terms of the language that we use, in terms of cultural customs, in terms of traditional ways of working, tools, whatever it is, we always have those ways of marking them out, of dressing up the fundamental difference between men and women. And it seems to me that part of the struggle of a book like this, and is the struggle to find an appropriate language to, it's like naming or marking the boundaries of a scent. You can sense that scent when you walk into a room, but it's very hard to draw a line around it and say this is where it is, this is where it's not.

Or thinking about the difference between two instruments playing the same notes, but with a very different timbre, and the sense that you're hearing a different sound, even though it's the same note being played. In the same way with men and women, you can

have the same virtue of whatever it is expressed by a man or a woman, but it has a very distinctive and different character. You can't say that it's a different virtue, but at the same time you want to put your finger on that difference.

So I'll be interested to hear in your wrestling with the language to speak about these sorts of things. What are some of the thoughts that you've had? What are some of the things that you found helpful? Well the first thing is this, we have to learn to really appreciate the strengths of the other sex. And on average in our culture, we have just, we have failed to recognize the wonderful gifts of women.

In part the feminist movement is trying to change women into men. The only thing they're wanting to mark as successful for women is to do things that maybe men like to do. Although they don't seem to be very big on getting women to be serial killers, or psychopaths, both of which happen to be very masculine activities.

But we need to recognize how wonderful the interpersonal is. We wouldn't be here without the love of a mother, or the care of when we were growing up. There's no such thing as a self-made man, no such thing.

Just ask his mother who changed his diapers, fed him, took care of him, etc. etc. for many years before he could even taught him his language, all sorts of things.

So the first thing I think we have to do is recognize many of the relatively neglected great strengths and virtues of women. The next thing we might want to do is to say, look, psychology, believe it or not, has discovered the virtues. When I mentioned that to some of my Catholic friends, they say, well, it only took them 2,000 years or more.

And then I say, yeah, it's true. But the philosophers, maybe starting even 2,500 years ago, discovered the virtues, but they didn't do much about them but taught. So we're trying to study them.

And I think it's important to see how each of the virtues is expressed positively but differently with men and women. And I was thinking about the virtue of courage. And the ancient tradition did not talk about women as having courage.

I think they have a lot of courage, in fact, and the ancient world was biased. And anyone who has followed it since. But I think they show a different kind of courage.

I think women show what I call interpersonal courage. And the first courage that women show is to be able to want and to have a child. Many times in history, having a child has meant a real risk of death.

It always means a risk of loss of, say, some beauty, perhaps. It certainly means the certain risk of loss of sleep. And so to even have a child is to show courage, including the risk of death.

But it's for a person. And in a way, for men, the greatest form of courage is to die for your buddies in battle. It's a physical death in a different way.

It's not you're defending others, but you're willing to give up your life for your others. And Jesus calls this, you know, no greater love is there than to give up your life for your friend. And men are called to that.

Women are called to it when the friend is their child. I'll be interested, maybe developing this a bit further. We talk about differences on various levels.

So some of the differences that you're talking about are sort of differences on average. If you had a bell curve, it would be just the difference between the mean of that. At other points, we can talk in a more universal way of certain differences that tend to hold for every single person who's male or female.

There are very distinct traits that I think often those are related to what it means to be a father or a mother, for instance, that these are not just about feelings of psychological tendencies. It's about a real bodily fact and a relationship that arises from that. We can talk about differences of distribution.

So it's not just about the average. It's about some of the outliers that certain outlier cases are typically or overwhelmingly male or female. And that can be an incredibly important thing for society.

I mean, if you think about some of the differences, even in the mean and then the outliers, you might think about the fact that in just about every single human society, men are five inches taller than women. But when you think about the outliers, those who are over six foot, there's about a thousand men over six foot for every one woman who's over six foot. And at the outlier, it really does make a difference.

And many of the things that we talk about in society, the extremes, whether that's the extremes of violence or you mentioned psychopathy or serial killing, whatever it is, these sorts of extremes of negative as well as positive behavior can really skew in a particular gender direction for that reason. Yes. And then there's also things like pronounced group differences, the differences between the dynamics of an all male or an all female group, which will tend to accentuate some of the individual average tendencies and then also maybe pull towards some of the more extremes of the curve more generally.

And it seems to me that when people talk about difference, often they're focused very narrowly upon universal individual differences. And there's not a struggle to bring into the vocabulary and into their thinking, these differences that work on other levels, which really make a huge difference for thinking about what it means to be male or female in society and how those facts register on a social and cultural level. How would you suggest that a Christian approach or Catholic approach can maybe speak to that

particular question to have a sense, not just of male or female as lots of individuals who may have a universal set of qualities or maybe certain tendencies, but something that is expressed at a higher level that kind of we can see not just in the individuals, but in the larger group of men or women? Well, that's a tough one if you want to know my answer.

And I see it primarily, I don't see it as having a special, at least I don't see it as having any special Catholic character. I think it's a general Christian issue. And it reminds me of a book called *What to Do About Men Behaving Badly*.

And it reminds me of a comment made by a woman in the middle of the 19th century who said she didn't want to go to heaven because all the interesting men she knew weren't there. And what this really means is men are often outliers. And they can be outliers on the positive end, but they can also be outliers on the negative end.

So, I think they're more often just outliers in all kinds of ways. And so, we have to find a way to understand that although men may want to only claim the positives, they have an obligation to deal with these people who are serial killers. I mean, look at all these people like Stalin and Hitler and all of their helpers and everything else and Pol Pot and Maut.

I mean, all these people who are responsible for the deaths of so many people. It's very clear that men can treat people as objects. And it's bad enough when they treat a woman as a sex object.

It's even worse when they treat somebody as an object that has to be sort of smashed like an egg and laughingly called, well, I'm making omelets, you know, that type of thing. And that's that interpersonal failure. It's the absence of adequate empathy.

And in some important sense, women are the antidote to that. And they can help us see this outlier problem when it is on the negative. And then we should point out to feminists that, you know, if you want to have women be only like men on the positive side, then you're going to have, you're going to be, then you're going to make yourself into the perfect sex.

You'll have the virtues of men without their vices. And so, you know, you're being sort of an imperialist. So anyway, I'm just sort of free associating here, trying to struggle with what you're saying.

But we just have to understand again, the synergistic thing that comes from putting us together. And this is helpful, then there are, it can often, I think, be helpful for in groups that have a great deal of impact on culture, for both men and women to have input to it. And in some cultures, and even ours, particularly in the past, there was very little input from women.

I mean, at the level of, you know, running businesses and things like that. On the other

hand, you can't get too much either sex, or you're going to end up with, you know, problems one way or the other. But to have the both views present in a setting seems to me to be very plausible and very desirable.

And it looks like God created that as the normal view for a family. Should have both. And the data always seems to be that sort of untethering of the interests and the activities of one sex from the other in a way that we cease to be the students of each other.

And there's a way I think it seems to me that so much in scripture and elsewhere, you see the impact of women upon the men who spend time with them and vice versa, that we can learn from the virtues of the other sex. They won't become our virtues in quite the same way, but being around the other sex and learning from them, we can actually, for instance, a man can learn how to act around children and to care for children in a way from women that he won't learn from other guys of his acquaintance. And he will be a better man for having learned those lessons.

And likewise, women have lessons to learn from men that won't make them into men. They shouldn't aspire to be like men, but rather to have men as their companions and teachers that they can learn from some of their virtues and strengths and then start to exemplify those in a feminine way, just as men should learn to exemplify some strengths that they learn from women in a masculine way. Absolutely.

And I just wish what you just said would be broadcast all over the world. But one thing I wonder... Funny example, I've been interested in some of the Catholic female saints. And when you look at them, I'm thinking of some of them, you know, who would talk to the Pope and tell him how to improve his life and do things.

And I was very interested in these female saints. And what was good about them was this, they always remained feminine, even when they were telling the Pope, it's time to come back from Avignon and go to Rome, you're not doing it right. And they did this because they didn't see this as power that was theirs or anything like that.

They knew they were responding to God's request for them to do something. And so they were a messenger rather than a boss. And so they were both very feminine and very holy.

And they, but they were nevertheless very forcefully present. And many Popes or other Catholic hierarchy recognized this, that somehow or other, this woman in her womanly strength was not there like another man threatening him. She was there as somebody who was loving and kind and wanting to give something positive to him.

And so that it wasn't a competition, it was a true communication of help. And that's what I think a holy Christian woman does. And in that way, she's being active, she's being significant and communicative, but she's not taking over a masculine role, but she's

having a real impact.

And she's showing courage, and she's showing intelligence and energy. It seems to me that many of the reasons why we're having these sorts of conversations right now have to do with historical and social changes that have provoked, led to a situation where if you are going to be a woman in a typical traditional way, you will be marginalized within society. And the household has been pushed to the margins.

Increasingly, if you want to be someone who's having social impact, who's wanting to be laboring and making a difference in a very concrete way within your immediate community and having status and some sort of honor, you need to be out there in the world of business in the world of politics, etc. In a way that pulls you away from those connections where raising children and being part of at the head, being within your household and organizing your household, ordering things around your household, having a household business, for instance, these sorts of things. And so that tension, I think, is one that many women feel very keenly, that the traditional understanding of their role was one in which in many former societies they could exercise with the dignity of having a place in their society that was recognized as they performed that.

But within our society, that's very difficult when there are these contrary forces pushing them on the one hand outside of the home to get things that they could formally get within the context of the household. And on the other hand, they feel the call of the attachments to their family and their children to the realm of the household as things that are pulling them away from other things that are important and rightfully important to them. How do you suggest that, first of all, an individual woman can respond to those issues and those tensions that she might feel as a Christian? How should she relate those her faith to that particular tension that she feels? How should the church maybe address these social problems and create spaces in which women can actually be given the proper dignity that they should have and the space for productive, honored activity within society that does not pull them away from those family attachments and that fundamental form of labor that has been historically and I think biblically associated with womanhood? Well, if I had a magic wand, but I don't.

So, look, that's our society. And in certain ways, our society is just disintegrating. I mean, it's falling apart in ways that may mean it's coming to an end of some kind.

But there's every reason in general to think that in the future, with population decline in most of the Western world, it's already within much of modern America, except for immigration. But I mean, you know, even Mexico, by the way, is below replacement birth rate. Of course, they're sending a lot of them to us, but I'm not saying, you know, but they're not replacing themselves even in Mexico now.

They're not in Iran years ago, then, when below. One general principle is, if any resource becomes rare, it becomes more valuable. So, in the future, that's not here now, I agree.

But the future, their children will be much more valued because they'll be much rarer. But in the meantime, I don't know what to say to the individual woman out there who's facing this problem. The reason is each person is facing it in a very different context.

And you can't give very good advice unless you know much, much more about it. And so the only kind of advice I would give is to pray a lot and to talk with other women and men, if they seem appropriate, about how to cope with it. But women are usually pretty good at finding other people who can be helpful than they can talk to with and, you know, at networking.

But in any case, pray a lot about what you should do. And then remember not to be too attached to the outside world. Attach yourself more to our Lord and hope he will guide you.

But the particulars, I know enough from clinical psychology, you can't give a big general advice. Everybody's situation is remarkably particular. And I don't know them, of course.

How do you think the church can be a place of hope and for resourcing the imagination in response to some of these social and also personal challenges? Okay, well, one thing they could do is this. One thing they could do in the church could make groups of men available to help, I'll say single mothers and others who don't have a man there to help them. Now, we'll fix your windows, we'll put on a new roof or whatever.

We'll, you know, a group of us will do what we can that way. Another is to have celebrations of the, you know, like you have a dinner party and you say, we would like to, you know, for us in our community, you know, so and so is the woman of the year. And they might, the women might pick and so and so is the man of the year.

And you each pick out somebody who has in their womanly and manly way and especially helpful to your community. And you give them, you know, you give them public acknowledgement. Seems to me that for many of us, the thing that has made a big difference is having examples and particular individuals in our lives that model certain of the virtues that we are then led to aspire to.

I think that's one thing that Christianity has always had the witness of the saints. And that can be the witness of the saints of history that exemplify virtues that we can aspire to and give us a sense of what humanity can be in a way that exceed the mere sites that are given to us by our society, where we live by just by sight and work in terms of the narratives and the frameworks and the rituals that are given to us. And maybe thinking beyond that, what it would mean to live by faith with some of the resources from the Christian faith that are thrown into sharp relief by people who live exemplary lives.

Yes. And some of those maybe major, but at least lots of those minor saints are in your own community. And it's time to have some recognition of them, not for being saintly,

but for being, if you will, helpful for us as a woman, helpful for us as a man.

We admire what you've been able to do for us. And it's always in the service. It's the way in which a Christian shows love.

That is the major message that we're asked to provide. Historically, these conversations have tended to focus upon the questions about gender, the questions about how the church thinks about the sexes has tended to focus upon the question of women. And increasingly, it seems to me that there is a movement towards talking more about men in many contexts, that young men seem to have lost their way.

And this is sometimes attributed to a feminized society, sometimes attributed to just emasculation, that they have no way in which they can live out what it would mean to be a man within their context. Maybe there's just not the means for them to succeed in the workplace, to succeed in their relational life, whatever it is. How can we address a crisis that seems to be coming to us increasingly from two fronts? How can a vision, for instance, of this synergetic relation help us to speak to a sense of a painful difference, where each sex has its own problems, and those problems are felt differently and drawing them more and more away from each other, and often placing them into greater antagonism with each other? Yes.

Well, look, again, that's a big problem. It's a very difficult one to answer in a simple way, except with my magic wand, which seems to have disappeared. There are now organizations of men.

I know in the church, there's some people in the St. Joseph's Society. They're rediscovering the importance of Joseph and his fatherly role. The real issue is this.

It's to find positive ways that men can behave that will help others. And there are lots of ways that can be done. One thing, this is a off to the side, but there is today a big, loosely defined underground movement, not just Christian, but for men, that's concerned with rediscovering basic skills.

And whether these are in farming or in woodworking and cabinetry or wherever these might be, there's a whole underground involvement in learning basic skills, fixing things, making things. There are all kinds of videos available now, show you how to do things, build a house, whatever. So getting involved in the real things that men used to do is important.

I think this is true also for women. Some of the same things are happening. They're getting involved increasingly in recovering all kinds of cooking skills, sewing skills.

Under COVID, one of the things that was interesting is that most stores ran out of yeast. Everybody was baking and many stores ran out of, certain kinds of stores ran out of material and thread and things of that kind. I'm hoping someday someone's going to

write a long book about COVID projects and what we all learned through taking on these new activities.

All of a sudden we discover we can do them ourselves. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Terrific.

And so I think it's learning how to do real things that we always used to do that have been somehow rather snatched by the consumer society and the high-tech society and so forth. And so if we can rediscover those, maybe it's, as I said, maybe it's going back to the land. Maybe it's going off the grid.

Maybe it's getting together and working with other women on new kinds of child rearing or new kinds of ways of teaching prayer to young children. Or maybe it's on how to deal with teenage daughters in a way that's really constructive and they learn something from you or from your friend next door better than from you. But working in a community sense where you're face-to-face and you're actually dealing with real problems.

That's where I would go. But that's the best I can say. It seems to me that what you're giving there is not a universal ideological answer, but rather showing people where they can find resources, resources in the models that they can follow.

Yes. People of an older generation or even just the videos that you can find in direction that way, or finding communities, other people who are dealing with the same challenges, who would be fellow travelers on the way. Finding a sense of just learning to pay attention.

I think that's one of the things that comes across in the sort of work that you do within this book, that it's paying attention to art, paying attention to human nature, and learning to work with the grain of that. It's not a high level abstract ideology that's being imposed upon reality. It's recognizing the shape of reality and then learning to work in an imaginative and creative way with the material of reality.

And that will include our own nature as male and female. You said it. You said it perfectly.

All you have to do now is make everybody hear it. The reality is dealing with reality so that children can do it. Anybody can do it if they really cope with it.

One of the big hazards though today for children is that they can start not dealing with reality. They can start by dealing with virtual reality. And so they never really understand their body or the real world outside, and they never really understand actual relationships because they're always dealing with some relationship on the internet or on their phone or something like that.

And those, if they start too young in a person's life, they denaturize you and move you

away from reality. So let's be careful on virtual reality with children. I think it's one of the things that has led to us facing these sorts of questions that, as you say, the more that we are detached from nature, the more we become detached from our own nature, which is knit into that.

And I've seen it in terms of an astronaut being put up into space and they're not experiencing gravity, they're not experiencing the regular pattern of the days, they're not experiencing their bodies in the same way, and all these other processes are thrown out. And as a result, their bodies start to languish, their muscles deteriorate, they start to lose their patterns of sleep, they start to feel nauseous. And in many ways, because of various aspects of the modern world, we become likewise detached from those things that ground our nature.

And finding that ground once again, and I think some of the beacons towards that ground can be found in scripture within the tradition of the... Absolutely, absolutely. Look, Alistair, you got, you nailed it. You're nailing it.

You don't need to ask me. This need to be with reality, even if you spend too much time as an astronaut, eventually you lose your sight. They're very worried about that.

You go too long in space, you end up blind. It seems to me then that what we need is a lot of creativity, imagination, community as the means by which we can face a crisis that I think we're all experiencing in our own individual situations, in our community communities, and in our wider society. That sense of disorientation that is felt increasingly, and I think people know that they're experiencing this.

And this is maybe something that as we deal with this ourselves, we can start to give something to others as examples and models. And it can be part of the witness of the church. Absolutely, it'd be a wonderful witness, a wonderful witness.

And we don't have to be imaginative in some huge, creative, abstract way. We just have to be imaginative with the reality that we're dealing with. Think about it, how to deal with it, how to be real with what reality is giving you.

It's been wonderful having you to discuss these issues with me. Thank you so much for joining me. And I would highly recommend that people take a look at the book.

It's the complementarity of women and men, philosophy, theology, psychology, and art. Buy it, you'll like it. I'll put a link in the show notes.

Thank you. God bless, and thank you for listening.