

Citation of Vatican Documents in “One in Christ Jesus”

by Susan Benofy, Ph.D.

At first glance one expected an improvement in the second draft of the American bishops pastoral on women because of the greater use of references to encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, council documents, papal addresses, etc. (We will refer to these collectively as Vatican documents.) It was especially promising that there were 22 citations of *Mulieris Dignitatem* and 9 of *Christifidelis Laici*, both of which have been issued since the first draft was written. The teachings and insights of these documents, however, do not seem to be incorporated to any significant extent in the new draft—odd in view of the fairly large number of references to them.

A closer scrutiny of the actual use made of various Vatican documents in the text of the pastoral reveals numerous instances in which short phrases were taken from a document, but no substantial use made of the document itself. This is apparent, for example, in sections 47 and 95, which between them account for five citations of Vatican documents. More serious are incomplete or out of context citations or paraphrases which change the emphasis or application of a statement.

For example, in section 2 we find: “It holds that women and men have ‘the same nature...the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition.’ ” *Gaudium et Spes*, 29 is cited as the source of the passage put in single quotes here. The excerpted passage gives the impression that *Gaudium et Spes* is here concerned primarily with the equality of women to men. In fact, the full passage begins: “Since all men possess a rational soul...since they have the same nature and origin...” The passage is concerned with the equality of all human beings (of which the equality of men and women is a corollary). The replacing of the initial phrase changes the emphasis.

Section 42 contains a footnote (24) which quotes from *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 14: “The concrete and histori-

cal situation of women... is weighed down by the inheritance of sin.... this inheritance is expressed in habitual discrimination against women in favour of men.” The full passage is: “Jesus enters into the concrete and historical situation of women, a situation which is weighed down by the inheritance of sin. One of the ways in which this inheritance is expressed is habitual discrimination against women in favour of men. This inheritance is rooted within women too.” The full passage specifies discrimination against women as only one manifestation of the inheritance of sin and points out that women also have this inheritance.

A more serious problem with an incomplete quotation occurs in section 50. There we read: “The love of husband and wife...‘becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ.’ ” The passage in single quotes is from *Familiaris Consortio*, 13. The full clause from *Familiaris Consortio* is: “the marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ.” The love between the spouses, rather than the marriage bond itself is said to be a symbol of the new covenant in the pastoral. This then leads to a statement in section 51: “*Provided...love prevails, marriage...is a great blessing.*” (Emphasis added.) The two passages taken together could seem to imply that when “love” no longer “prevails” the marriage is no longer a symbol of the covenant, which would certainly weaken the idea of indissolubility of marriage. In contrast *Familiaris Consortio*, 13 goes on to say: “By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner.”

Section 50 speaks of spouses in a happy marriage and then says: “In the words of Pope John Paul II, they are meant to enjoy ‘a more lively awareness of personal

freedom and greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships.’ ” *Familiaris Consortio*, 13 is cited as the source of the passage in single quotes. In its original context this passage is a statement of one of the positive aspects of the situation of families in the world today: “On the one hand, in fact, there is a more lively awareness of personal freedom...” That is, the original source asserts that this “more lively awareness...” is present in the world at large, and the pastoral uses it as an illustration of what ought to occur, and then only in a “happy marriage.” This is an odd use of that quotation.

The passage in section 96 of the pastoral to which footnote 65 is attached concerns Baptism, and says Baptism makes us “members of the body of Christ and, therefore, his image and presence on earth.” This is applied to both men and women. This may be a problem if it is saying both men and women are images of Christ. Section 7 of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, cited in 65, however, is concerned with the Genesis account of man being created in the “image and likeness of God,” and does not mention Baptism. The connection between the pastoral text and the text cited in the footnote is obscure.

Section 97 of the pastoral contains no direct quotations from Vatican documents, but cites *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24 in a footnote. Apparently this paragraph of the pastoral is intended as a paraphrase of part of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24. Passages in both documents point out the long time needed to realize the ideal of “no more slave or freeman” in the actual abolition of slavery. However, the pastoral talks as if this problem has been completely solved, while in the cited section the Holy Father goes on to say: “And what is one to say of the many forms of slavery ... which have not yet disappeared from history?”

A more serious problem in this paragraph, however, is its treatment of the parallel argument concerning the equality of men and women. It speaks of “new insights into ... equality” and says: “Today we are beginning to see that...relationships must be transformed...” This phrasing gives the impression that insights of the last few years are meant. However, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 24 speaks of the “‘innovation’ of Christ” as expressed in the New Testament. It is Christ’s “new” view of marriage which the Holy Father says “...must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behavior and customs. This is a call which from that time onward does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew.”

Section 117 of the pastoral quotes both *Inter Insignores* and the Commentary on it concerning the diffi-

culty of accepting today certain of the arguments against the ordination of women advanced in past ages. The full sentence from the Commentary is: “It is because of this transitory cultural element that some arguments adduced on this subject in the past are scarcely defensible today.” The first part of this quote should not be ignored, especially since the pastoral authors wish to support their position with arguments from the contemporary “women’s movement”—a transitory cultural phenomenon. Furthermore, the Commentary goes on to say: “Above all, it would be a serious mistake to think that such considerations provide the only or the most decisive reasons against the ordination of women in the thought of the Fathers, of the medieval writers and of the theologians of the classical period.” To quote the two negative passages about past theological arguments without this clarification is to give too negative a view of theological arguments concerning the ordination of women.

In section 124 the quote from *Christifideles Laici*,⁵² (footnote 110) is correct in saying that the Holy Father urges “the coordinated presence of both men and women”. However, the Pastoral goes on to say that progress toward this goal will be achieved when “men strive to change the structures” that oppress women, and then gives feminism and “solidarity among women” as “signs of hope.” The prescription for achieving this goal in *Christifideles Laici*,⁵² is quite different. There it says: “...the most ... fundamental way to assure this coordinated and harmonious presence of men and women in the life and mission of the Church, is the fulfillment of the tasks and responsibilities of the couple and the Christian family in which the variety of diverse forms of life and love is seen and communicated ...” It is hard to believe that the pastoral and the encyclical can really be talking about the same goal when their proposed ways to achieve it show so little resemblance.

Section 139 says that when they “...are fully respected as equals ... women will ‘uncover, cherish and ennoble all that is true, good, and beautiful in the human community.’” *Gaudium et Spes*, 76 is cited as the source of the section in single quotes. The original reads: “Holding faithfully to the gospel and exercising her mission in the world, the Church consolidates peace among men, to God’s glory. For it is her task to uncover, cherish, and ennoble all that is true, good, and beautiful in the human community.” This passage occurs at the end of a section on the role of the Church in the political realm.

Why is something the Church *is doing* turned into

something that women *will do*, and that only when they “are fully respected as equals” and “their talents...are fully utilized”?

In section 152, footnote 129 from *Christifidelis Laici*, 49 is a correct quotation, but the interpretation provided in the pastoral is disturbing. Immediately after the quote from *Christifideles Laici* it says: “This means in effect that Christians must reject...all practices that make women feel as if they are not accepted.” As some women feel as if they are not accepted as long as they cannot be ordained, this seems to contradict the (half-hearted) defense of an all-male priesthood in another section of the pastoral.

The quote (footnote 135) from *Christifideles Laici* in section 157 on the special contribution that women have to make is only one part of a two-fold mission as stated by the Holy Father:

“In particular, two great tasks entrusted to women merit the attention of everyone. First of all, the task of bringing full dignity to the conjugal life and to

motherhood...Secondly, women have the task of assuring the moral dimension of culture, the dimension—namely of a culture worthy of the person--of an individual yet social life.”

Quoting only the second of these tasks, as is done in the pastoral, gives a false emphasis which is reinforced by following the quote immediately with section 158 which is a list of primarily political causes and activities that it is claimed women have been involved in. No mention is made here of marriage or the family.

It is disturbing that so many passages from Vatican documents are taken out of context and then misinterpreted or simply left incomplete in a way that tends to leave the reader with a false impression. A much more careful consideration of Vatican documents, especially of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, is clearly needed.

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