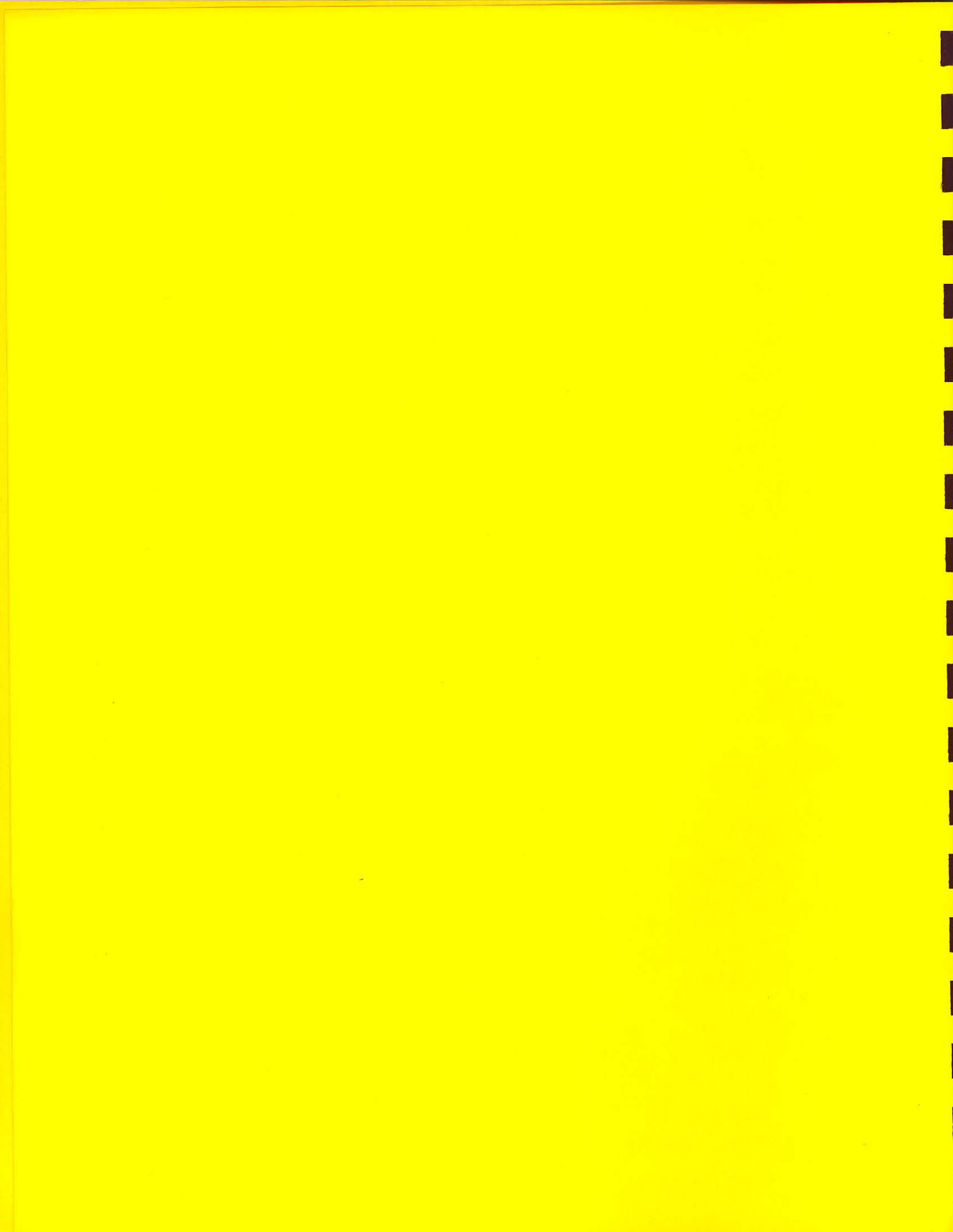




Commentary on
'Called to be One in Christ Jesus'

Third Draft of the "Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns"

June 1, 1992



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'Called to be One in Christ Jesus'
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To the Bishops of the Church in the United States:

We wish to express our concern about the current draft of the proposed pastoral letter, 'Called to be One in Christ Jesus.' We understand the purpose of a pastoral letter to be essentially catechetical in nature; and that the intention of the bishops in writing such letters is for instruction and formation of the faithful. Therefore, it would seem essential, in order to achieve this, that any pastoral letter should present the teachings of the Church in such a way as to be truly formative, positive and unifying.

We are now convinced that this pastoral effort was fundamentally flawed from the beginning, in that it is not actually the bishops exercising their teaching function, but their 'response' to a limited set of 'women's concerns.' Furthermore, the pastoral's basic agenda, process and content have been principally determined and governed by the feminist critical perspective, although the recent draft obscures this, to some extent, by use of more vague means of expression. All the pastoral drafts adopted an inverted perspective of the feminist critique of the Catholic Church. None have offered critical appraisal of feminism from the point of view of Catholic teaching, however.

The draft's fundamentally feminist theological perspective is revealed in its repeated emphasis on 'sexism' as a 'sin' which is the basis of virtually all other sins and evils of mankind. This view which virtually equates 'sexism' with 'original sin' pervades the pastoral. Particularly clear examples are found in Chapter 1, ¶ 16-18; footnotes 6, 8; and in ¶ 32, which says,

"The biblical account of sin's entrance into history in the third chapter of Genesis depicts the particular way women have suffered as a result of sin: the unjust domination of men over women, the violation of equality in relationships and the failure to respect women as persons. These sins, described so vividly in Scripture, are characteristic of what we have termed the 'sin of sexism.' They reflect from a biblical point of view a threefold disorientation toward power, pleasure and possession. The craving for power not only competes with God; it also prompts stronger people to dominate those who are weaker ..."

No critique is attempted, here or elsewhere, of the basic feminist/liberationist assumption that all relations between human beings are essentially relations of power. No critique is attempted of feminist spirituality and feminist theology which, although radically opposed even to the most fundamental dogmas of Christianity, have now become pervasive within the Catholic Church itself, and their influence seriously threatens the faith of all — in particular that of Catholic women.

The document contains no critical appraisal of the manifold errors of feminism: its distorted view of the nature of human beings, of relations between the sexes, of attitudes towards sexuality, of the nature

“To the extent that the draft erodes Church doctrine and authority by concession to feminist demands... it compromises its character as a pastoral letter.”

and mission of Christ and His Church; nor are the multitude of sins (e.g. abortion, abortifacient contraception, sterilization) which are intrinsic to feminist ideology so identified.

There is a fundamental conflict between feminist/liberationist social analysis and the teachings and tradition of the Church. This essential conflict, which is at the root of much of the confusion and dissent in the Church today, is recognized both by orthodox Catholics and those who reject essential Church teachings; however, this, too, is substantially ignored by the pastoral draft.

Since the draft fails to address this conflict in a way consistent with the fundamental nature of the Church, it also fails to offer useful and consistent suggestions for the inevitable encounter of individuals with ideologies alien to Christianity or to the resolution of problems, conflict and confusion within the Church and in society which result from this encounter.

To the extent that the draft pastoral has failed to accede fully to feminist demands, feminists within the Church are angered by the result. To the extent that the draft erodes Church doctrine and authority by its concessions to these demands and by its conciliatory tone towards those who do not accept Church teachings (nor her authority to teach), it compromises its character as a pastoral letter.

Some further problems include the following:

1. The pastoral does not actually respond comprehensively to ‘women’s concerns’, nor did the “listening sessions” on which the pastoral was based accurately reflect the experience of most Catholic women. The “consciousness raising” format of the meetings tended to attract discontented women, and the questions posed tended to elicit predictable critical responses. The data from these sessions was given far too much weight in formulating the pastoral’s response and recommendations.
2. Not all of the pastoral’s twenty-five recommendations follow consistently from Church teachings. In some instances the recommendations contradict the body of the text itself. Implementation of several of the pastoral’s recommendations not only cannot help, but can actually hurt the Church’s mission. In fact, no consensus in support of many policies recommended by the pastoral exists, either within the Church or in society, and certainly not among Catholic women.
 - a) The recommendations contain an ominous blueprint for increasing Church bureaucracy and setting in motion machinery (through establishing “women’s commissions”) effectively to exclude both the testimony and the work for the Church of orthodox women, who already have difficulty enough making effective witness of their faith. Will establishing ‘women’s commissions’ in every diocese actually promote authentic unity within the Church?
 - b) Is a ‘sensitivity-to-women test’ for seminarians the most important factor in determining a man’s suitability for the priesthood?

Feminist ('inclusive') language in the Church — in liturgy and scripture translations — may alter the Catholic faith and jeopardize authentic belief in order to appease feminist reformers.

c) Would the bishops' official support for social programs such as "flex-time", "comparable pay for comparable work", government sponsored day-care, and similar 'family' legislation genuinely help most Catholic women or their families?

3. Of particular concern to many Catholics — both women and men — is the project of mandating "inclusive" (feminist) language in the liturgy and Scripture translations. A great many women are, in fact, offended by this deliberate distortion of the language, seeing it, correctly, as a capitulation to feminist demands.

Feminist language in the Church is not merely an inconsequential annoyance. Because these new translations frequently alter the substance of the Catholic faith, they jeopardize authentic belief in order to appease feminist reformers.

4. A central concern of a multitude of Catholic women — the religious and moral formation of the future generation of Catholics — is inadequately addressed by the pastoral. In actuality, Catholic mothers and fathers responsible for the religious and moral formation of their children usually receive little support from bishops when they object to defective or even destructive moral and religious education programs which now exist within all levels of the Catholic school system, from elementary school through the university. Many Catholic teachers and university professors are equally concerned and frustrated.

The bishops, who are ultimately responsible for the content of morality ('sex-education') and catechetical programs taught to Catholic children and young adults, should monitor personally and carefully all such programs used within their dioceses. This is a growing problem which must no longer be ignored by the bishops, nor consigned to educational 'experts' within the bureaucracy.

5. There are many social plagues afflicting women and their families in our modern world: divorce, artificial contraception, fornication, sterilization, abortion, abortifacient pills & IUDs, infanticide, pornography, homosexual perversions, AIDS and other venereal diseases, sex education propaganda, euthanasia, artificial reproduction, child and spouse abuse, to name a few. While the draft mentions some of these which can be related to 'sexism', it omits those which do not fit well within the standard feminist social analysis.
6. Many Catholic women religious encounter problems living their faith within their religious communities. The pastoral entirely ignores — in fact, denies — the virtual decimation of religious orders of women when it asserts in ¶116, "*Partly as a result of Vatican II and partly through the influence of the women's movement, women religious and lay women are discovering a new solidarity. ...Such woman-to-woman support is a contributing factor to the emergence of new forms of consecrated life.*"

The pastoral ignores the fact that there are serious conflicts within religious orders over essential

The pastoral ignores serious conflicts within religious orders over essential matters of faith. It provides no useful support for orthodox women religious who are often intimidated into silence by dissenting leadership.

matters of faith. It provides no useful support for orthodox women religious who too frequently are intimidated into silence by dissenting leadership.

7. There is a deep desire for spiritual development among Catholic women in all states of life — a desire which, when vital and authentic Catholic doctrine is missing, can often lead to disordered and distorted quasi-pagan forms of religious expression. This is a growing problem, especially within some religious communities of women; yet the pastoral offers no critique of these esoteric, alien and spiritually destructive forms of worship, nor does it offer suggestions for replacing them with genuine devotions which enrich and enliven true faith.
8. The draft contains sections on two critical issues which have been the subject of considerable controversy due to feminist critiques (ordination and contraception), but its treatment of these questions is insufficient. Although official Church documents and papal statements are cited, the draft's use of these materials is inadequate, and the compelling reasons for the Church's perennial teaching are not effectively presented. In fact, the pastoral still cites works of feminist theologians (e.g. Margaret Farley, Elizabeth Schlusser-Fiorenza) who are radically critical of Church teachings in these as in other matters, as if such opinions offer important insights in elucidating these issues, equal in importance with magisterial teaching.

WE ARE CONVINCED that, if approved by the bishops, the pastoral 'Called to be One in Christ Jesus' will not help to resolve conflicts nor to restore harmony in the Church — among women and men, in women's religious orders, in parishes or diocesan offices. It will not increase authentic vocations to the religious life or to the priesthood. Neither can it help to settle disputes about legitimate roles for laity and women in the work of the Church. This document will not help to dispel confusion about the Church, her teachings or her mission. It will not help Catholic people to understand and accept the teachings of the Church. It will not help women to deepen their spiritual lives nor to increase personal holiness.

If this pastoral were issued in the name of the bishops of the United States, we are convinced, it would actually be divisive, not unifying; it would intensify polarization among Catholics, encourage dissent, and increase the temptation of some confused Catholics to ignore the authentic message of the Church when it conflicts with their own notions; and it would, in the perception of many Catholics, diminish, rather than enhance, the magisterial authority of the bishops themselves.

Therefore, we urge the bishops to terminate all further work of the Committee on the Pastoral on Women in the Church and in Society, and to discontinue the process which began thirteen years ago (in 1979) with "dialogue" between the Women's Ordination Conference and the Bishops' Committee on Women.

Instead, we hope that the bishops will find means to disseminate throughout the United States the teachings contained in such papal documents as *Familiaris Consortio*, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and

It will not help Catholics understand and accept the teachings of the Church. It will not help women to deepen their spiritual lives nor to increase personal holiness. It will encourage dissent, and diminish the authority of the bishops.

Christefidelis Laici, the 'Charter of the Rights of the Family', *Redemptoris Missio*, and other such teachings which do respond directly to the principal concerns and needs of most women and their families. It seems clear that these documents, two of which were issued soon after the first draft of this pastoral letter appeared, were intended especially to address central issues affecting the role of women raised by feminism which have gained currency in the West, as well as providing the groundwork for vigorous and authentic evangelical action by the laity consistent with the salvific mission of the Church. Surely the Holy Father's intent was that these teachings be used by the entire Church.

We would like to see the resources of the bishops' Conference (NCCB/USCC) used to produce and promote study guides, workshops, symposia, audio and video tapes which are *faithful to the teaching contained in these papal documents*, thus making this invaluable resource available to everyone.

We further suggest that the bishops of the United States request that the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, give serious consideration to issuing an apostolic exhortation (or an encyclical) addressing the critical subject of feminism.

Finally, we pledge to the bishops our prayers, our support and assistance in any way available to us which might be useful to them in their often difficult task of nurturing the true faith which subsists in the Catholic Church and of carrying Christ's liberating message of redemption to the entire world.

WOMEN FOR FAITH & FAMILY

CONSORTIUM PERFECTÆ CARITATIS

June 1, 1992

Feminism, Sexism and Original Sin in 'Called to be One in Christ Jesus'

Susan J. Benofy

IT IS GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED that the condemnation of the "sin of sexism" is a primary purpose of the Pastoral on Women's Concerns. Press accounts of the release of the third draft, *Called to be One in Christ Jesus*, like those reporting the releases of the first two drafts, generally emphasized this, mentioning the "sin of sexism" in the headlines or at least in the lead paragraph. This does not seem to be merely an exaggeration by the media. In the summary of the third draft in the Bishops' official publication, *Origins*,¹ we find 'sexism' mentioned first in the list of topics discussed in the pastoral, and 'sexism' and the related adjective 'sexist' may well be the most frequently used words in the document. In one fairly short passage of four paragraphs [16-19] 'sexism' appears nine times and 'sexist' five times.

Since the term is given such prominence we naturally ask: "What is sexism?" In the draft, the term first appears in [16] where we are told: "...women acknowledge as a main cause of personal and societal discrimination the evil many today term 'sexism,' defined simply as unjust discrimination based on sex." This last clause of this sentence seems to give a sort of definition of sexism as "unjust discrimination based on sex." If this is taken seriously as a definition however, the sentence is reduced to saying that a main cause of discrimination is discrimination. which is meaningless. Still, in [17] we again read "sexism, a form of unjust discrimination based on sex." This paragraph ends with a reference to "the sin of sexism" and the next sentence begins "Unjust discrimination of this sort..." [18].

On the other hand, [16] refers us (in footnote 8)

to an article by Sr. Margaret Farley,² which states:

Sexism refers primarily to the belief that persons are superior or inferior to one another on the basis of their sex. It includes, however, attitudes, value systems, and social patterns which express or support this belief. It is a contemporarily coined term, rising out of the women's movement, and not ordinarily used neutrally in its application to men or women. Rather, it indicates almost always the belief that it is men who are superior and women who are inferior because of their sex.³

This definition makes 'sexism' a *belief*, while the earlier definition made it a *practice* (discrimination). Using the same term for two different ideas causes confusion. The "belief" idea of sexism seems to be the one used in [19], for example, where 'sexism' is termed "a fundamental disorientation", although then it is hard to see how we can "uproot" its "underlying causes" as the previous sentence says we must do. It is, of course, reasonable that a *practice* like discrimination would result from a *belief* in inferiority, but it should be clearer whether such a key concept represents a belief itself or the practices arising from it.

Note also that the term 'sexism' is one coined recently by feminists. We have been told in [8] that the bishops' purpose is "to make known...the depth of our tradition so that... we may...penetrate it more deeply with right judgment and apply it more fully in daily life." Certainly in two millennia this rich tradition must have developed *some* concept of the problem the bishops wish to discuss and corresponding vocabulary with which to discuss it. Why, then, in a statement of Catholic teaching is there this dependence on an ill-defined feminist neologism for the expression of a key concept? The difficulty with the use of this term is com-

pounded by the fact that "it is not ordinarily used neutrally" so that, for all practical purposes, women are not capable of committing the "sin of sexism."

It is particularly disturbing that this discussion of 'sexism' appears in Chapter 1 of the pastoral. This is the chapter which is supposed to discuss Christian anthropology and to have been revised extensively after a consultation with the Vatican. In a sidebar in the *Origins* edition of the pastoral⁴ Bishop Clark is quoted as saying that this consultation "had its most significant impact on the first chapter" and that this chapter was "strongly influenced by the current pope's thinking on the subject." Although Pope John Paul II has discussed the topic of the dignity of women extensively, especially in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, but also in *Christifidelis Laici*, and in his set of talks in which he developed a theology of the body⁵ he never uses the term 'sexism' in his discussion. Certainly no reference is given to a papal definition of sexism nor is any indication given that sexism is being used as an equivalent to any term in the papal documents. Does the "significant influence" of the Vatican consultation extend to the definition and condemnation of sexism? If so, why is there a total absence of citations on this point?

A KEY THEME in the Catholic understanding of human nature especially as elucidated in the recent writings of Pope John Paul II, is the idea of the complementarity of masculine and feminine. How extensive is the influence of recent papal teaching in the treatment of complementarity in the pastoral? There is some treatment of this topic in the pastoral but there seems to be a lack of conviction, even a defensiveness, about it. We are told in [27] that: "Masculinity and femininity is [*sic*] ... not an obstacle to be overcome." In [17] it is stated that we "...must acknowledge and value sexual difference while resisting the sin of sexism." There seems to be an excessive concern here with the possible problems resulting from recognition of sexual differences; especially since there is no concern at all with the devaluing of the feminine which can result from an exclusive concern with equality, especially when this is measured in terms

of such things as power, status and income as the feminists tend to do. Moreover, there is no discussion of how sexual differences might lead to some legitimate distinction of roles for men and women. Treatment of this topic is necessary, especially since we have already been referred to the Farley article on 'Sexism' which also states:

"No longer is it argued that...wholly passive roles should be assigned to women either biologically or theologically.... Nonetheless, at least one theory remains which continues to support gender-role differentiation in a way that limits women's roles ...and makes them subordinate to roles open to men. This is the theory that women and men are essentially complementary in a way that justifies distinction of roles without violating equality."

Note that here 'complementarity' is called a "theory" not a fundamental teaching about human nature. There is also an assumption that any distinction of roles necessarily means that women are treated as inferiors. There is no explicit refutation of this view in the pastoral.

The Farley article concludes with this assertion:

"...exclusion of persons from major roles in the Church...on the basis of sex constitutes unjust discrimination, the perpetuation of sexism in thought and social structure."

This statement clearly charges that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is an example of the "sin of sexism" yet it is not specifically refuted in the pastoral.

It is extremely disturbing that this article, which was *not* cited in the second draft, was *added to the references of the third draft* while the explanation of the reason for the tradition of an all-male priesthood was dropped from the text and citations of the studies of Hauke⁶ and Oddie⁷ which defend this tradition were eliminated from the new draft.

PERHAPS THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM with the use of the term 'sexism' occurs in [32] which deals with "... sin's entrance into history " as depicted "in the third chapter of Genesis..." This is a subject to which Pope John Paul II has given much attention in his recent writings. Probably the most complete discussion is contained in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 9 (a section never cited in the pastoral). In this

passage we read:

“But there is no doubt ... *that the first sin is the sin of man, created by God as male and female. It is also the sin of the “first parents”, to which is connected its hereditary character. In this sense we call it “original sin”.*

...

At the same time, however, as the author of the evil of sin, *the human being—man and woman—is affected by it.* The third chapter of Genesis ... shows the perspective of “toil”, by which the man will earn his living (cf. *Gen 3:17-19*) and likewise the great “pain” with which the woman will give birth to her children (cf. *Gen 3:16*). And all this is marked by the necessity of death, which is the end of human life on earth.” (Emphasis in original)

Compare this to the treatment of the same topic in [32] of the third draft of the pastoral, where we are told that:

“The biblical account of sin’s entry into history in the third chapter of Genesis depicts the particular way *women* have suffered as a result of sin: the unjust domination of men over women, the violation of equality in relationships and the failure to respect women as persons. These sins, described so vividly in Scripture, are characteristic of what we have termed the “sin of sexism.” (Emphasis added)

The contrast is striking. The Holy Father emphasizes that both man and woman are responsible for the sin and that both suffer the consequences, though to some extent in different ways. The pastoral, on the other hand, mentions only how *women* have suffered. No mention is made of any consequences for men, and, since “the unjust domination of men” leads the list of the consequences suffered by women, we are left with the impression that men alone are responsible for sin and women suffer the consequences. This impression is strengthened when the sin described in Genesis is called, *not* original sin, but “the sin of sexism”! (Recall that the term ‘sexism’ is “not ordinarily used neutrally in its application to men or women.”⁸)

This is the clearest instance of the intrusion of feminist ideology into the pastoral. This ideological focus produces serious distortions of even the most fundamental teachings about the nature of man and woman. These distortions in turn affect the entire discussion in the draft pastoral, including its recommendations.

No number of revisions of the text will be sufficient to correct these flaws, because they are inherent in the very process by which the document was produced. This pastoral should be rejected and the process terminated.

NOTES

¹ *Origins*, 21:46 (April 23, 1992) p. 761.. Numbers in brackets { } refer to paragraphs as numbered in this edition.

² The citation of Sister Margaret Farley, RSM, a signer of the controversial 1984 *New York Times* ad sponsored by Catholics for a Free Choice, is new to this draft. In its 1988 critique of an earlier draft the militantly feminist Center for Concern complained that “work of some of the most creative and prophetic women scholars are not apparent”, and they cited examples including Sr. Margaret Farley, Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ (also an ad signer), Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, Sr. Sandra Scheiders, and a few others.

Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza is cited in footnote 37 of the new draft as an example of “pioneering scholarship [which] has helped the whole church recognize the place of women in the biblical accounts.” Schussler-Fiorenza regards the scripture itself as oppressive of women. Her book *In Memory of Her* demands that the oppressive texts be “demythologized as androcentric codifications of patriarchal power” that “cannot claim to be the revelatory Word of God” (page 32); further, she insists that scripture be subjected to a “hermeneutic of suspicion” in order to transform and ‘re-construct’ it according to feminist notions.

³ Margaret Farley, “Sexism,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Supplement), Vol. 17 (Washington: Publisher’s Guild, 1979), p. 604.

⁴ *Origins* 21: 46, p. 763

⁵ Published in three volumes:

Original Unity of Man and Woman, (St Paul Editions: Boston, 1981)

Blessed are the Pure of Heart (St Paul Editions: Boston, 1983)

Reflections on Humanae Vitae (St Paul Editions: Boston, 1984)

⁶ Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988)

⁷ William Oddie, *What Will Happen to God?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988)

⁸ Farley, “Sexism”.

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Comments on the Third Draft of the Pastoral on Women's Concerns

Janet E. Smith

LET ME BEGIN by saying that my purpose here is not to provide a thorough analysis of "Called to Be One in Christ Jesus", nor to point out all its strengths and weaknesses. Although there are some improvements in this draft over the first two it is not the purpose of this critique to acknowledge these systematically. While the committee is to be commended for having overcome some deficiencies of former drafts, what seems most important is to point out the weaknesses that remain. In my view, the document is seriously flawed to the extent that it ought not to be issued as a final statement by the bishops.

Although the committee that issued this statement is entitled the Ad Hoc Committee for a Pastoral Response to Women's Concerns, "Called to Be One" is addressed primarily to the concerns of feminists; this was a common observation about the earlier drafts as well. The concentration on sexism indicates that feminists are the primary inspiration of, and perhaps the expected primary audience of the document. While many women certainly are concerned about sexism and many of these women are in the Church, not all women are feminists; not all women place sexism high on their list of concerns. Indeed, what remains troubling about this pastoral in all its drafts is that the concerns of a key group of women are left largely unaddressed. Women who are not troubled by various teachings of the Church but find them intellectually and spiritually satisfying and find their lives enriched by lives of faithful adherence

to them, do not have sexism as their foremost concern. Rather they are largely concerned about how to raise children to be faithful Catholics in a society that is largely anti-Christian and in a Church full of confusion about what the Church teaches. They desire guidance on how to bring the practices of their Church and their society into line with true Christian values, to live in accord with these values and to fight all injustices, not simply those rooted in sexism. Whatever injustices they suffer at the hands of a sexist society are not their foremost concern. For those who are married, the foremost concern is how to be good wives and mothers; for those single and in the religious life, the foremost concern is how best to serve the Church in a hostile world. Justice and civil rights are surely concerns for those working to build the Kingdom of God, but this document suggests that a concern with one particular violation of justice and civil rights, sexism, is nearly exclusively the subject of women's concerns. I think sexism is the foremost concern of most feminists, but not of most Catholic women and certainly not of many (if not most) Catholic women who live the Church's teachings most faithfully.

In spite of some disclaimers to the contrary, "Called to Be One" gives the impression that women are disgruntled with much in their Church. No attempt is made to gauge how many women are dissatisfied; do they represent the majority, a significant minority, or a small minority? Without some attempt to measure their numbers, the im-

pression might well be left that most women or a very large portion of women in the Church are unhappy with the teachings and practices of the Church. But even more important and disturbing is that no attempt is made to discern if those women who are dissatisfied with the Church for various reasons, are making their evaluation on the basis of gospel values or on the basis of the values of modern secular society. Nor is any attempt made to discern the justice of their charges against men and the Church; their concerns are reported in an uncritical fashion.

Throughout, the voices of those who complain about practices of the Church and who reject some teachings of the Church seem to have made a greater impression on those who wrote the document than did the voices of those who accept the practices and teachings of the Church. No indication is given that there are Catholic women who oppose female acolytes, who oppose inclusive language, who accept an all male priesthood without objection. To leave their views unmentioned, to concentrate on the dissatisfaction that some women express about the Church on certain matters and not to acknowledge that there are also many women vocally and zealously in support of the Church on the same matters is, again, to give a false picture.

“Called to Be One” is largely focused on injustices done to women; these are many and it is right to draw attention to them. But a balance needs to be presented. Are women only the victims of injustice, or are they not also the perpetrators of injustice? Are they not concerned with their own moral responsibility as well as that of others? Are they not concerned to be just to others as well as to ensure that others are just to them? Do they not need — and want — to be called to a more faithful living out of the gospel? Do they fail to live the gospel faithfully primarily because of the obstacles put in their path because of the sexism in our society? Or are not women sometimes the

sources of injustice and wrongdoing?

“Called to be One” endorses many of the concerns of the feminist movement and surely some of their concerns are in accord with Christian values. Yet, it is clear to any Christian that the feminist movement is not an unqualified good. It is a tremendous force pushing for sexual liberation, contraception, abortion, sterilization, sinful modes of reproductive technology, active homosexual lifestyles, marxism, witchcraft, etc. (The programs of any feminist convention will bear out these charges.) Do not women who are seeking full civil rights for themselves and others need to be warned about joining activist groups such as

NOW, groups that are working to perpetuate many of the evils that Catholics are working hard to eliminate? In this document we are told that women are the victims of those who are overly attached to power, possessions, and pleasure. Women need to be warned

Concentration on sexism indicates that feminists are the pastoral's primary inspiration... and primary audience...

not to succumb to those attachments themselves. To have a document on women's concerns, one that focuses very sympathetically on several of the chief concerns of feminists, and to have nary a word critical of the pernicious elements of the feminist movement, is, I think, irresponsible.

Reading the “signs of the times” requires more discernment than “Called to be One” evidences. Sexism is a great evil and the source of many of the troubles of women, but it is not the sole or perhaps even the primary source of such troubles. Papal documents frequently speak of erroneous notions of freedom that govern the modern age and influence our personal lives and social policies. A true diagnosis of the condition in which we find ourselves requires an analysis of such notions of freedom. Faulty views of the human person and of the purpose of human sexuality are as much behind the troubles that all women face as is the sin of sexism. To concentrate exclusively on one evil, is to present an unbal-

anced picture and thus may serve to misdirect what efforts need to be made to truly help women better their condition and to help women be better Christians.

Furthermore, most Catholic women today are torn between a culture that mandates that they seek self-fulfillment and that they distinguish themselves in the workplace and a Catholicism that requires that the needs of the family must come first. Catholic women need help in thinking through what vocations or careers are most fully in accord with gospel values. This document does little to assist them in discerning what place career and what place family should have in their priorities. Although the concerns of mothers are occasionally mentioned, again, I sense that their concerns are of secondary importance to those who drafted this document. For instance, many Catholic women

are extremely concerned about the school systems, Catholic as well as public. They are concerned about the faithfulness of Catholic doctrine presented to their children in Catholic schools and universities; they are concerned that the sex education programs of the public schools follow the agenda of Planned Parenthood and that the sex education programs in the Catholic schools are not much better. They are concerned about the decrease in vocations but are hesitant to encourage their children to enter orders that are marked by dissent, to encourage their sons to go to seminaries that are known for permissive sexual behavior. They are concerned that their children have the experience of beautiful and reverent liturgies. These are real concerns of Catholic women and ones the bishops have the means of directly confronting and correcting. While women should be paid a just wage in the marketplace and the bishops are right to call for such, there are certain practices taking place within their sphere of direct influence that need to be addressed. For instance, women who attempt to

Women who choose to be wives and mothers are not denying their authentic human personhood, but indeed are fulfilling it.

get the school systems (both public and Catholic) to provide sex education that promotes chastity and abstinence meet with much resistance from the schools. The bishops should express their admiration and compassion for such women; they are often very unsung heroines.

Mention of the need for greater tax deductions for families, of the value of a voucher system for schools would also show that the bishops have the concerns of mothers in mind as well as the concerns of feminists. Certainly some interest is shown in the concerns of mothers; mention of the need for flex time and job sharing indicates an awareness of the needs of working mothers. But little indicates an awareness of the needs and concerns of mothers who stay at home. Women who have large families and who stay at home to raise their children are often mocked as not doing work worthy of adult human persons. This document, in spite of some clear

efforts to the contrary, unwittingly, it seems, and largely by omission, fails to promote the values of motherhood and to make it clear that women who choose to live their lives as devoted wives and mothers are not denying their authentic human personhood, but indeed are fulfilling it.

There are patterns of speech in this document that produce confusion. It regularly makes distinctions between "many" women, "some" women, "most" women and "women". What sense are we to get from such distinctions? When "Called to Be One" speaks of "women" without a qualifier are we to understand it to be speaking of all women or only some (or most or many) women? For instance, section 92 states, "Women carry the mission of the church forward in ways worthy of the highest praise and gratitude," and section 93 states, "Women are signs and effective instruments of God's transforming love in the world." These generalizations are certainly not true of all women. What exactly is being claimed in these generalizations?

On occasion the terminology of psychology enters into the document where terminology of the Church would be more precise. In section 6, for instance, we learn that Christ's teaching confronted "inappropriate" behavior. Psychologists speak of "inappropriate" behavior; Christians speak of "sinful" behavior. Section 71 tells us that preachers and counselors should help abusive spouses come to understand why such behavior is "unacceptable". They should also be helped to see that such behavior is sinful. Sexism is unacceptable and a sin; abuse is unacceptable and a sin; abortion and contraception are sins; words carry a certain force and speech should be as precise as possible. More than sexism should be labeled a sin in this document.

Comments on the content of specific sections should serve to illustrate the types of problems pervasive throughout the document.

Section 69 does not begin to do justice to the complexity of the proper relationship between husband and wife. It states that, "In traditional understanding women were seen as subordinate to the headship of their husbands; in contemporary teachings, as in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, a couple is called to be subordinate to one another. In an ideal marriage, individual gifts are valued and spouses respect each other as equals before God." Mutual subordination does not necessarily rule out the headship of the male in some respects; the complex question of proper roles for males and females is left altogether untouched.

This section displays another peculiarity and deficiency of "Called to be One". It seems (unintentionally, to be sure) to characterize the relationships between husband and wives as ones that should be governed largely by a respect for one another as equals. It is in the context of seeing sexism as a violation of human rights that husbands are implored not to be 'sexist' towards their wives. Calling to the attention of men that they are

treating their wives unjustly may certainly be helpful in guiding them to correct their attitudes and behavior, but an appeal should also be made to the love that spouses should show for one another; husbands should treat their wives in accord with the demands of full human dignity not simply because they should not violate the rights of their wives, but because they should not violate their vows of love. This document seems to see all human relationships as governed by the demands of rights; the language of Christian and familial and spousal love should appear much more often than it does in "Called to Be One".

This document seems to see all human relationships as governed by the demands of 'rights.'

Section 70 makes reference to male insensitivity. This is another instance of unbalance. To speak of male insensitivity without also acknowledging that many males are devoted, helpful, and sensitive husbands and fathers seems unjust. The document verges on conveying an anti-male sentiment in some passages; more statements laudatory of males would give the proper balance.

The sections on birth regulation (77-83) are somewhat improved from the former draft but are still inadequate. Section 77 tells us that "some feel obliged to leave the Church if they cannot follow this aspect of the church's official teaching" (what does the adjective "official" attached to teaching imply? why not simply "the Church's teaching"? if adjectives are needed, I recommend the Church's "unbroken and constant" teaching). It tells us that "others choose to remain in the church but not to comply". Later, "Called to be One" asks for better formation of consciences and better instruction. Isn't this document the appropriate place for such instruction? It would be helpful to tell us what should be the relationship to the Church of women who contracept. To raise the question and not to answer it adds to the confusion. If there is some general guidance that could be given, about the need for regular mention

of the sin of contraception in the confessional, this should be mentioned.

Section 79 rightly tells us, in reference to contraception, that couples have "a right and duty

Those who wish to learn why the Church teaches what it does and how to defend the Church will receive little guidance from the sources cited.

to know what the church teaches and an obligation to respect the authority of that teaching." Why not clarify the authority of that teaching for couples? There is a vagueness here that contributes to the very confusion that the document says the Church should work to dispel. Here would be the proper place to begin dispelling the confusion of Catholic women and couples about this issue.

Footnote 46, attached to this section, is misleading and contributes to confusion in the Church. To say that "disagreements among theologians as to the obligatory force of these norms has produced much confusion" is certainly true. But does this mean that the norms are not obligatory? Could not the bishops take this as a proper occasion to clarify matters and reduce the confusion?

Indeed, it is not right for the document (in footnote 46) to direct readers to the opinions of Andrew Greeley and Mary Durkin and to leave Pope John Paul II's strong statements on the need for Catholics to abide by this teaching unmentioned. Neither *Humanae Vitae* nor *Donum Vitae* are mentioned at all in the document or the notes, though their content is clearly relevant to the discussion. Why Greeley and Durkin and not these documents and not the writings of the Pope? If Catholic women were to go to the footnotes of

this document to try to learn Catholic teaching on these and other matters more fully, they would not be directed to many of the key documents and would instead be reading much that is misleading. Dissenters are cited with no indication that those who consult these authors are likely to find much in opposition to Church teaching. Note 57 is a case in point: the work of these feminist scholars has been uniformly to demand changing essential Church teachings. Those who wish to learn why the Church teaches what it does and how to defend the Church will receive little guidance from the sources cited in the footnotes.

In section 81 we are told that some couples are not convinced of the effectiveness of NFP. Would this not be the proper place to provide the data that should convince them? Is their failure to be convinced rational or irrational? Footnote 48 to this section could be more informative. Bishop James McHugh's office has commissioned a report on the satisfaction experienced by users of NFP with the method; it should be referenced.

To talk about abortion and not to talk about excommunication and confession seems irresponsible (section 84). Many Catholic women have had abortions and one of their concerns is their

Womens commissions will represent primarily the concerns of feminists... increase polarization among women...

relationship to the Church. Priests are rightly directed to be compassionate in the confessional; but women who have had abortions or who have assisted and counseled abortions should be directed to go to confession.

In section 87, as elsewhere, certain socio-

logical facts are mentioned without any guidance as to how these facts are to be interpreted in light of the Church. We are told that some divorced and separated women have been asked to resign from certain parish ministries and committees. The implication is that these women have been treated unfairly but no explanation is given. Is divorce never a disqualifying act, or does it depend upon the circumstances of the divorce?

Again, in section 96, some sociological facts are mentioned without any guidance as to how they are to be interpreted. We learn what some women claim about the Church's treatment of women but are not given any indication whether their interpretations accord with the facts or not. Finally, in section 110 we learn that the authors of this letter takes *Inter Insigniores* as their "point of reference." What precisely does this mean? We

are told that the tradition is normative. But this very good guidance should be placed in closer proximity to section 96 where we are given the impression that the issue is open-ended.

Section 131 issues a call for the establishment of commissions on women in church and society in each diocese. When bishops are complaining about too much bureaucracy in the Church it seems unwise to add another commission. But the greatest fear is that these commissions will, as does this document, represent primarily the concerns of feminists and further marginalize and alienate women for whom feminist concerns are not a high priority or who, in fact, oppose feminist ideology. Women's commissions may well increase the polarization among women rather than uniting women in the effort to form the world in light of gospel values.

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Women and the Bishops

Paul V. Mankowski, S.J.

I

*Tell me, my daughters —
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state —
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge?*

— *King Lear*

Poor, sad, proud, too tender Lear: the old man who loves to be loved; the prince embarrassed by the scope of his authority, yet jealous of royalty's perquisites; the ruler willing to give away his lawful prerogatives in order to hear—if just for a moment—that sweet gush of feminine gratitude; the vain old duffer whose need for affection makes him oblivious of its counterfeit, whose hunger welcomes a Goneril's flattery and spurns the candor of a Cordelia.

The tragedy of Lear has recently been transposed into middling farce and gruesomely replayed before us. The occasion is the publication of the second draft of a pastoral letter composed under the auspices of a committee of American bishops charged with women's issues. The first draft, titled "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption," appeared in the autumn of 1988, and caused an entirely predictable stir by repenting, in the name of the Church, the "sin of sexism," which was to be understood along conventional feminist lines. Another attempt was called for, and the result is a document named "One in Christ Jesus."¹

Like its predecessor, the second draft is subtitled, "A Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society," and the authors are almost pathetically eager to assure us that their effort was the product of listening, rather than a patriarchal alarmism: "We were asked repeatedly not to write this pastoral as if women were the problem, but to focus solely on the sources of discrimination against women in church and society."^[4] Such repetition was wholly unnecessary, as the authors demonstrate emphatically and at painful length; they were more than happy to cooperate.

The listening session (if I may without flippancy so name it) with which Lear began his own downfall was staged by him as an act of humility; yet in truth it was an exercise in senile vanity and fatuous, even willful, self-deception. Lear's counterpart in the contemporary Church is a certain segment of clergymen which has made it a practice to vindicate its prejudices by affecting to consult with the faithful, to listen to their concerns, only to announce with astonishment that God's Little Ones are pleading for precisely those changes for which the Listeners themselves have a deep and discerning sympathy. These are men who, for the most part, came of age in the '60s and who were infected by the enthusiasms of that time; men for whom social and political concerns are of more moment than narrowly doctrinal ones; men who attained positions of trust in the Church on the strength of pastoral abilities; men grown impatient of theology and baffled by the attention

paid by a younger generation of churchmen to sources of traditional wisdom.

But most of all they are weary men. Bone weary. King Lear weary. The authors of "One in Christ Jesus," several of whom belong to this party, exhibit this weariness at every turn. They write with the edgy impatience that comes not from an excess of energy but from fatigue. There is no other way to account for the peevish tone of the letter, its thorough-going theological obtuseness, and its alarming rhetorical tumbles into crude emotivism:

We feel a sense of urgency to do whatever must be done to show that we take women's concerns seriously. We believe what one woman said: "The church is a powerful witness in the world. The world will watch how she treats all her children...rather than listen to a dusty document." [170]²

These are sentiments which we will be asked to believe have come from the pens of Catholic bishops. To dismiss the attention due the Church's written instruction as "listening to a dusty document" is inane, more the language of a high school manifesto than an episcopal council, and especially perverse given the purpose and history of the magisterial office. But the authors are not sophomores, and their Grand Simplification suggests the last ditch appeal of a would-be avant-garde which is watching the future slip out of its grasp. There is a touch of theatricality in the authors' peculiar self-regard: they commit themselves to "whatever must be done to show that we take women's concerns seriously," not, e.g., "whatever might be done to help women." Consequently, we begin to suspect that what is called "urgency" is more accurately a panic at the prospect of being left behind by History. Such an anxiety does not lend itself to great precision of thought:

In our efforts to listen to extensive consultations in dialogue with the word of God and to be authentic teachers of the faith, we have had to advance arguments not always acceptable to some segments of the Christian community nor to a number of respected Catholic scholars. Study and dialogue are essential...Transformation is a slow and at times a painful process, but in the end it is a more fruitful and a more

Christian exercise to research, to debate, to invite and to persuade than it is to declare and stand by a position that has not been exposed to this kind of scrutiny. [12]

In the notion of "dialogue with the word of God" we have a theological surd; in the expression "listening to consultations in dialogue" we have a windy tautology that adds up to no idea at all; in the statement that "transformation is a slow and at times painful process" we have a platitude too vague to be instructive, since transformation is also a rapid and at times painless process. To assert that debate and persuasion are "a more Christian exercise" than simple declaration is vacuous if the Christ the authors have in mind is Jesus the Nazorean, since the best reports we have credit him with precious little in the way of either. Of course, the whole question of whether bishops discharge their office more faithfully by persuasion or by edict turns entirely on the nature of the positions under dispute, but such niceties are beyond the scope of this letter. The drafters seem less concerned to teach than to give evidence of politically correct attitudes, and the call for study and dialogue is simply one of the poses which must be assumed. By the end of the document this stance is forgotten, and with a rather lofty indignation we are warned not to seek asylum in the library:

Having heard the Word, having seen Love hanging on a cross, we cannot take refuge in safety zones of discourse and debate. [167]

But how do we let go of discourse and debate, if we are to embrace them as a "more Christian exercise" than simple assertion? Or how do we commit ourselves to study and research, without giving substantial weight to dusty documents? To press such questions is to miss the point of this letter, in which "caring" counts for more than consistency. As in those UNICEF cards which come out at Christmas, glaring and eternal contradictories are to be sunk in the face of a brightly crayoned expression of juvenile bonhomie.

II

*O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!*

The prime obstacle to a just assessment of the thought of this letter is its own language; on any reckoning, it is an unbelievably bad piece of writing. The diction is trite; syntax is often muddled beyond repair. It is pointlessly, relentlessly repetitious, and the reader has the curious sensation of being trapped by a lost cab driver trying to bluff his way through town, while the same three or four ideological landmarks keep reappearing with no cogency of method or presentation.

The vocabulary is fundamentally that of the Sharing Group, laced with the clumsy jargon of the Caring Professions, thus: "Quality time spent together in recreation, prayer and other restorative activities may be sacrificed for business concerns." "To nurture children is to experience one of the closest relationships a person can hope to know." "Violence against children by parents and other adults (?) is the antithesis of Christian parenting." True perhaps, but banal beyond our deserts. So too we feel something less than the full blast of the Pauline *kerygma* when we read, "Single Christians share a unique calling in the church to witness to the life of Jesus of Nazareth, who was God and Savior and single." Or again, the authors favorably quote a woman who complains, "My most recent expression of oppression (occurred) when I was told outright that since I was single...the parish had not much to offer." Such a reading of "oppression" is doubly inept. It both trivializes the sufferings of victims of real injustice—those who are denied fundamental human goods without cause—and it makes us skeptical of how seriously we should take the document's other pet bogeys. If the lack of a parish bridge club for singles, say, counts as oppression, how are we to interpret the "injustice in church structures" which is so roundly deplored?

In other places, a phobia of seeming "exclusive" traps the authors into endless *catenae* of

qualification. Whole paragraphs seem to have been built by amendment:

As long as fruitful love is present, the witness of married love remains effective even when children are not forthcoming. Provided a couple's pledge of love prevails, marriage between Catholics or between Catholics and other Christians or members of other faith traditions as well as non-believers can be seen as a great blessing.[51]

We do well not to inquire too closely, in the case of marriage to a non-believer, what the witness of married love is witness to.

This air of whimsy or arbitrariness is not simply a literary blemish that more careful editing could remedy. It points to a defect in radice: the complete lack of an intellectually coherent framework in which the issues—which are serious issues—can be discussed. The authors maintain the same sententious baritone throughout their rudderless tour, and any sense of proportion is accordingly lost. In paragraph #55, for example, spouse abuse and a "master-slave pattern" in marriage are condemned. Yet in the following paragraph we read,

With little or no assistance from their husbands, some women who work outside the home may be forced to expend many other hours on household chores, child care and myriad other tasks from nursing to chauffeuring with minimal cooperation from the "man of the house." This inexcusable insensitivity magnifies when husbands retain total control of money and refuse to let their wives know anything about common finances.

The bathos is unfortunate, but in paragraph #56 the subject of psychological abuse and physical violence is taken up again, with no clue that beating one's wife and, e.g., failing to help with the dishes might call for different kinds of episcopal censure. Such a collapse of perspective in only comprehensible in light of the deeper allegiances of the drafting committee.

III

What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.

...

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave

My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty

According to my bond, no more nor less.

In that it purports to be a "response" to the concerns of a diverse group of Catholic women, "One in Christ Jesus" is remarkable for its near-total exclusion of the ideas of non-feminists; Cordelia's silence is one of the loudest messages of this document. While the authors tersely acknowledge that a variety of opinions exists, the methods and attitudes which they bring to their task are derived ultimately from feminist criticism. A consequence of this approach is a severe reductivism which transposes all religious activity into the terms of political progress and setbacks. In writing of "women publicly consecrated to virginity," they say,

Their witness stands out precisely because many achieved a certain autonomy with respect to men, a certain "emancipation" and a self-direction in pursuit of the spiritual life, advanced studies and apostolic works.[106]

In this view, the witness of holy virgins is not witness to Christ; they are not to be esteemed because they followed Jesus more closely or heroically, but because they were "emancipated," because they effected a political good. More painful still:

Women contribute beyond measure to carrying forward Christ's redemptive mission in the world. Witness their efforts to preserve and enhance the earth and the earth's resources, to take action against oppression, to demand human rights, just treatment for all and an end to war.[158]

Setting aside the tendentious tone of this passage and its frankly silly level of generalization, it disappoints most in its instantiation of Christ's redemptive mission: no mention of sin, no suffer-

ing, no atonement. Redemption, it would seem, is effected by a kind of Green Party activism. Of course, any single statement, even in the most carefully written document, stands to lose by being wrenched out of context. But surely we have learned from the history of doctrinal controversy that such expressions are wrenched out of context and are used by the unscrupulous to cause great harm; for this reason it is not captious to insist that the sentences of a pastoral letter have a *prima facie* orthodoxy even in isolation. Throughout the letter, key terms such as "patriarchy"³ and "sexism" are glossed in a narrowly feminist sense, without indication that the bishops might consider such definitions inadequate. In fact, it is in a footnote [n.18] that the authors come closest to revealing the epistemological foundations of their critique. Here we learn that a psycho-therapist named Anne Wilson Schaefer has found the roots of patriarchal sexism in what she calls the "White Male System," and we are referred to Ms. Schaefer's monograph on the subject.⁴ As a (reasonably white) male myself, I accepted our pastors' suggestion to look to Ms. Schaefer's book in order to better understand the roots of systemic sinfulness. It turns out that the Great Divide occurs over the notion of truth:

The levels of truth concept poses a serious challenge to the belief that there is *one real truth* about any issue. If each level of truth is in itself real, then the process of moving toward greater (different) truths must be one of expanding awareness (as in the Female System) rather than that of merely seeking a goal (as in the White Male System).⁵

The merits of this revolutionary system are not obvious on its own terms. Happily, Ms. Schaefer gives us an example of the levels of truth in action:

As a pre-teen I was unaware and did not care that many women shaved their legs (Level 1). When I became more sophisticated, I shaved my legs and underarms like most women of my generation (Level 2). When I started getting involved in the women's movement, I let the hair under my arms and on my legs grow (Level 3) as a political statement that women (and I in particular) were just fine the way they were naturally. Then, as I became aware that I did not want a movement to dictate to me any more than I wanted the

White Male System to, I started shaving my legs and underarms again (Level 4). Today, I find that I like to let the hair on my legs and on my arms grow during the winter—it makes me feel warmer—and shave it during the summer to feel cooler and sunnier (Level 5).⁶

It would be a relief to know that the Schaefer Approach was a fluke which slipped past the Committee and got itself buried in the footnotes. In that case we would be justified taxing the authors with recklessness; it is not too much to ask of a writer (or the signatory of another's document) that he be acquainted with his own references.

[Ed. note — reference to Ms. Schaefer does not appear in the third draft. However, feminist theologian Margaret Farley is cited in footnote 8 as a source for the pastoral's use of the term 'sexism'. Footnote 57 cites the "pioneering scholarship" of Adela Collins, Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, and Letty Russell, all of whom apply the feminist "hermeneutic of suspicion" to biblical texts, and are among the best known of radical feminist theologians. Thus, although the players are changed, the univocal feminist perspective is maintained.]

Yet there is also evidence that disgust for a White Male System represents the considered opinion of the drafters. For the fact is that they seldom stray far from the ideological terrain wherein "patriarchy" is the sin of sins, wherein all injustice has its roots in some form of masculine domination. The usual ploy is to impute to women, as women, a profound concern for justice and charity, with the implication that the failings, whether systemic or individual, are largely to be attributed to the ways of the male. For example, "the women's movement supports sisterly mutuality as distinct from relationships based on rank;"[127] or, "women have made and will continue to make exemplary contributions to care for the poor, to the peace and pro-life movements, to legal and political causes requiring their leadership;" [158] or yet again, among the "themes" of women's religious experience are, "valuing intimacy with God and friendship with others over individualism; risking change rather than settling for the rigidity of worn-out institutional structures; offering prophetic witness in the face of

social injustice." [129] Though the language here reflects the staple rhetoric of a petulant feminism, there is a novelty in that it was composed to be put into the mouths of the Catholic episcopacy. And it is hard to ignore the irony in the fact that, once the jargon is decoded, we will have found that one of the "worn-out institutional structures" mentioned above provides precisely that platform from which a bishop is entitled to speak at all. This subject requires a discussion of its own.

IV

FOOL: Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away. If I speak like myself in this, let him be whipped that first finds it so.

*Fools had ne'er less grace in a year,
For wise men are grown foppish,
And know not how their wits to wear,
Their manners are so apish.*

LEAR: When were you so wont to be full of songs, sirrah?

FOOL: I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; for when thou gav'st them the rod, and put'st down thine own breeches,

*Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung,
That such a king should play bo-peep
And go the fools among.*

The authors are insistent that "sexism" be treated as a sin, and morbidly insistent that this sin be attributed to the very structure of the Church, a disease of the marrow, not of the skin. It is very nearly an *idée fixe*:

The corrosive power of the sin of sexism has seeped into the fabric of our civilization, invading economic and govern-

mental systems as well as social and ecclesiastical structures. [34]

Again:

For too long we have stumbled in a blindness that has kept us from recognizing the evil of sexism affecting our lives, our relationships, our social and ecclesiastical structures. [42]

And again:

When men strive to change the structures and patterns of social and ecclesial life that account for the persistent oppression of women, true progress will be made. [124]

To appreciate the full depth of the authors' preoccupation with this subject it should be noted that all of the passages just cited fall outside of the chapter headed, "Injustice in Church Structures," which devotes six full paragraphs to the issue. This prompts the question, what exactly is meant by an ecclesiastical structure, if it can be both wholly pernicious and subject to alteration? Remarkably, in proportion to their exuberance in damning Church structures, the authors are correspondingly reticent in telling us which structures they have in mind.

Of course, it really isn't remarkable at all. The "structure" the authors are too bashful to name is that which keeps in place an all-male priesthood; as bishops, they cannot throw their support behind the ordination of women in so many words. The result is a curious hybrid: the drafters include a clear and well-reasoned statement which unambiguously upholds the Church's practice [113-121], elsewhere indicating by winks and nudges that, while their hands are tied, their hearts are with the Enlightened. They make a show of repentance and indignation about unjust ecclesiastical structures without condescending to specifics, knowing full well that the commentators will be able to pounce on the contradiction with glee.

For the contradiction has been "built in" to this letter. "One in Christ Jesus," like *Roe v. Wade* in Justice O'Connor's phrase, is on a collision course with itself. There is a difference, however. In *Roe v. Wade* the flaw was an inadvertent blunder; in

our document the drafting committee goes to great lengths to ensure that not even the dullest journalist or Director of Religious Education can fail to pick up the hint:

Christians must reject *all* prejudicial attitudes that persist toward women, *all* structures and stereotypes that subtly or overtly perpetuate injustices, *all* practices that make women feel as if they are not accepted. [152]⁷

It is nonsense to maintain that the Church could adapt her practices, even if she desired, to accommodate the feelings of any population, however defined. As with any other population, women as a group exhibit a wide spectrum of sentiment on a given topic; which woman's feeling will be taken as normative? As with any other population, the feelings of one and the same woman change over time; which emotion is the one that counts? The authors are absolutely right to condemn injustice; yet they lay the foundations of their critique not on the rock of a scripturally based moral theology but on the sand of political sentiment.

The tragedy, however, lies not in the logical naiveté on the surface of such a claim, but in the deeper vision of the Church which undergirds it. In this view, the "practices"⁸ of the Church have no intrinsic connection to her mission; they are tools, not truths. They may have served a purpose once, but were never themselves part of the purpose, and hence they can be replaced by more effective implements. Once dogma is conceived as radically distinct from revelation—not a focusing of the teaching of the Gospel but rather the product of ordinary politics—of course it will be viewed as expressing, not God's will, but the partisan interests of successful disputants at any given historical moment. And once ecclesiastical "practices" are construed as fossilized remnants of a purely political culture, there is no reason why contemporary politics can't change them to fit a newer agenda.

The vocabulary gives the game away: "We must undertake an examination of practices, possessions, power structures and lifestyles found within our own house that prevent the proper

advancement of women.” [153] Power structures, quotha?

V

Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature

To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.

Is it the fashion that discarded fathers

Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?

It must not be imagined that the compromise struck by the authors of “One in Christ Jesus” was distasteful only to the orthodox. The more combative Catholic feminists, for whom the unconditional surrender of patriarchy necessarily includes the ordination of women, have rejected the document out-of-hand. Msgr. Thomas Herron of Philadelphia has pierced to the core of the matter in arguing, “No episcopal document can be expected to satisfy those who reject the right of bishops to speak on this issue on the first place.”⁹ Rembert Weakland, the Archbishop of Milwaukee, has likewise urged in a column in his diocesan newspaper that the pastoral should be dropped.¹⁰ In a revealing, if infelicitous, turn-of-phrase, Weakland complains, “the section in the new draft on the ordination of women comes as an even more chilling cold shower.” Elsewhere in the same article, the Archbishop expresses sympathy for “the bind the authors are in,” but taxes them for not going further.

Such candor is to be applauded. Weakland makes explicit the confession at which the authors themselves balk: that they uphold the Catholic teaching on the priesthood under constraint, and for no other reason. Further, he makes it clear that the ardors which were dampened by this document (and which we may presume he shares) are not going to be appeased by halfway measures such as calls for inclusive language, altar girls, or diocesan “commissions on the rights of women.” The story

has been told before, but the moral bears repeating: you can never really dialogue with a Goneril, you can only trade places; and *Reganomics* make no provision for buying esteem on the cheap. “One in Christ Jesus” might well stand as an object lesson on how not to compose an episcopal document, but the happiest outcome is that it be gently steered into a tardy but well-deserved oblivion. Lear’s folly does not play well as theological vaudeville. Souls are at stake.

VI

Come, come, I am a king; masters, know you that?

Some scholars of more sanguine temperament have maintained that there is no great cause for concern about this pastoral letter, since it will be “saved from significance” by its bulk and sheer unreadability. Yet the fact that it was produced at all points to some trends whose import is not so lightly dismissed. Shortly before his death, the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar remarked, “The decentralization of the Roman Curia has led directly to the curialization of the diocese.”¹¹ Concomitant with this shift has been a huge increase in the bureaucratic size and complexity of national episcopal conferences (the US Catholic Conference and National Conference of Catholic Bishops employ 292 people in the central headquarters) and a corresponding swell of documentation. In the time from 1982 through 1988, the NCCB published 226 papers—44 in the last year alone.

There is at present a dispute among Catholic theologians about the theological status of episcopal conferences. The key question is: to what extent can a body of bishops assembled on the basis of political geography claim to speak with the doctrinal authority of the Church? I do not propose to offer an opinion on the subject, but it should be stressed that, whatever the right answer should be, its solution must assume that the bish-

ops in question are able to read those propositions which they will be required to endorse. Yet how many of the nearly three-hundred US bishops could have read more than a fraction of the 44 papers issued in their name in 1988? The basis for making a particular judgment is not here at issue; the question is whether it is humanly possible for a bishop to know what he is asked to say Yes to.

Is there a substantive sense in which the US bishops, as a body, still have control over the theology which is taught in their name? Before answering in the affirmative, there are several considerations which should give us pause.

First, the number and size of the documents which the bishops have taken upon themselves to produce make it impossible that more than a small percentage of them should have an active hand in the writing of any single paper; since the bishops delegated to a given project recruit writers of diverse ability to help them, results at the committee level are often shaky. Still, a bishop may reluctantly consent to a bad paper because the alternative scenarios are even worse.

Second, the complexities of single projects are magnified exponentially at the level of national consideration, where several documents are up for approval at the same time. Two factors are at work here. On one hand, the tiny ratio of actual time for debate to the number of pages under discussion makes adequate analysis impossible. There is no way an American bishop can study the sentences he is asked to endorse the way the bishops gathered at Nicaea could study the formulas of the Creed. On the other hand, the fact that the bishops have chosen to speak on issues of immediate topical interest increases the pressure for a hasty decision, rather than lengthy and sober scrutiny.

Third, the structure of majority consent breeds among the bishops a "dynamic of collegial dialogue"—in plain English: cutting deals. A man may feel compelled to approve three documents he finds defective in exchange for a vote for one project which he believes more important. Since most documents are approved or rejected in toto,

this greatly increases the chance of bad doctrine winning episcopal sanction.

Finally, the semi-public nature of the drafting process and the fact that documents are released prior to voting means that the true impact of the bishops' theology may be considerably different from what they intend. Few people will deny that the secular media can grossly distort the Church's message by arbitrary distribution of emphasis, yet the procedure now in place ensures that any journalist who wishes has the opportunity to do just that. This is bad enough for those documents which the bishops decide to approve; it is *a fortiori* harmful in the case of those they don't.

In short, the picture does not inspire confidence. The bureaucracy of the USCC was conceived as a tool which would help the bishops spread their teaching; it has burgeoned into a policy-making machine with its own ideas of what the Church should be saying and which the bishops have found progressively difficult to control. Similarly, the decision to speak as bishops in the public sphere on issues of technical controversy and partisan dispute was intended to increase the contribution of the Church's wisdom to civil discourse, yet it is arguable that the major political parties have changed the beliefs of Catholics more profoundly in the past twenty years than the Church has changed the beliefs of either. Several bishops have had to promulgate independent statements in the past few years precisely to counteract those of the USCC; Vatican interventions to rescue the bishops from theological solecism are increasingly frequent.

"One in Christ Jesus" should stand as proof positive to the American episcopacy that corporate direction of its own teaching has been all but broken by the strategy of the past two decades. After seven years, two drafts, and several changes of committee, we are presented with a pastoral letter on the concerns of Catholic women wherein Mother Teresa's gift to the Church does not earn a mention, while the social analysis of Anne Wilson Schaef does.* And, significantly, the only public

call for scrapping the piece has been made by an archbishop of feminist sympathies on the grounds that it didn't go far enough.

* [Ed. note: Although Ms. Schaef did not appear in the third draft, the author's point remains valid. Twenty-four radical femiist organizations have called for the scuttling of the third draft; but they also demanded that "dialogue process" continue.]

Doctrinal control can be salvaged, provided the resolve necessary to make some major changes is quickened. "One in Christ Jesus" is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the regnant philosophy of management, and its flaws are so glaring that they point the way out of the morass: less Pop Psych, more of the Gospel; less paper, more scrutiny; fewer words, and those more carefully chosen. The course ahead requires discipline, imagination, and spine. We may hope that our pastors will find it worth the effort.

July 21st, 1990

Footnotes

1 Published in *Origins*, Vol. 19, No. 44, April 5, 1990. Hereinafter, numbers in brackets [] refer to paragraphs as numbered in this edition.

2 Ellipsis in original. In obedience (we may presume) to some canon of feminist orthography, the authors consistently render "the [Catholic] church" with a lower case "c." I have preserved their usage in quotation.

3 In a footnote that repays scrutiny we are directed to the work of Anne Carr in order to understand patriarchy. According to a sidenote in this same issue of *Origins*, Sr. Carr had been named a consultant to the draft committee in 1984, only to resign after signing a pro-choice newspaper advertisement. The oblique inclusion of her thought says much about the ideological soil out of which this letter was produced.

4 *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in the White Male Society*. (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981)

5 Schaef, *op cit.*, p. 158. Emphasis in original.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Emphasis highly original.

8 Lest the point be lost, this letter refers to the reservation of the priesthood to males as the "church's practice" twice [115, 118]

9 Personal communication.

10 *Catholic Herald* (Archdiocese of Milwaukee), May 4, 1990.

11 Cited by Lucio Brunelli and Gianni Cardinale in "And the Word was made Paper," *30 Days*, July-August, 1989.

Father Mankowski is a Jesuit priest and biblical scholar from Cambridge, Massachusetts. This essay was excerpted in First Things in November, 1991, and section VI appeared in Women for Faith & Family's Commentary on the Second Draft Pastoral, September 1, 1990, but it has never before been published in its entirety. Although it was written in response to the second draft (thus citations and references are to that version of the pastoral), his critical appraisal remains valid for the third draft, as well as for the entire project.

STATEMENT ON FEMINISM, LANGUAGE AND LITURGY

Women for Faith & Family, Forum of Major Superiors, Consortium Perfectae Caritatis

April 18, 1989

Because we are Catholic women who accept and affirm all the teachings of the Catholic Church, not only as true propositions but as the norms of our thought and life;

Because we are aware of the influence within the Church and in society of alien ideologies which attack the fundamental assumptions of Christianity about human life and of the relationship of human beings with their Creator, and which effectively undermine the Catholic Church;

Because we understand our responsibility as Catholics and as women to witness to the truth which the Catholic Church teaches and our willing and free acceptance of her just and true authority vested in the Magisterium of the Church, particularly in Christ's vicar, the Pope, and Bishops in union with him, we believe it our duty to make the following statement:

1. In our time and culture, ideological feminism, which denies the fundamental psychic and spiritual distinctiveness of the sexes and which devalues motherhood and the nurturing role of women in the family and in society, is often misrepresented as expressing the collective belief of women. As women, we are particularly concerned about the pervasive influence and the destructive effects on the Church, on families and on society of this "feminism."
2. As Catholics who have been formed, inspired and sustained by the Sacraments of the Church through participation in the liturgy, the Church's central action and principal means of transmission of the Catholic faith, we are strongly aware of the power of symbol in human consciousness. We therefore deplore attempts to distort and transform language and liturgy, both of which make such potent symbolic impressions on the human mind, to conform to a particular contemporary ideological agenda at odds with Catholic belief and practice.
3. We reaffirm our belief in the divine origin of the Church and that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, which is often criticized in our time as insufficiently egalitarian, was intentionally established by Christ, and that He selected the Apostles and Peter, among them, as head, giving them and their legitimate successors magisterial authority to guide His Church until He comes again.
4. We believe that Jesus Christ, the Word of God made man, was limited and restricted by His culture only in that which, apart from sin, limits man. But we also believe that He came in a time and to a people chosen by God. Thus, all that Jesus took up from His culture by His teaching or action is normative for every culture of every time and place. We reject the notion that Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, was limited or restricted in the fulfillment of the Mission entrusted to Him by the Father by the cultural context of His presence on Earth, His life as a Jew of the first third of the first century, or by any other factor.
5. Accordingly, we also reaffirm the constant teaching of the Catholic Church that ordained priesthood is not a "right" accorded to any member of the Church, but a state of life and a service to which, by

Christ's will, only men, not women, may be called.

6. Following the teachings and example of Christ and the constant tradition of the Catholic Church, and mindful of its full significance, we consider it a privilege to call God 'Our Father,' a name which reflects not only the relationship between human beings and their Creator, but which also provides a powerful symbolic model for men of the steadfast love, faithfulness, justice, mercy, wisdom and objectivity which are ideal components of human fatherhood vital to women, to families and to the social order. Contemporary efforts to impute a 'feminine' aspect to the Godhead, by retrojection of alien and anachronistic notions into the body of Sacred Scripture, by forcibly changing the language used to refer to God, by deliberate reversion to pagan notions of deity, or by any other means, we regard as dangerously misguided and perverse.

7. Therefore we reject all attempts to impose ideologically motivated innovations on the liturgy of the Church or changes in official lectionaries or sacramentaries or catechisms in the name of 'justice' to women. We deplore the deliberate manipulation of liturgical actions, signs and symbols and the politicization of both liturgy and language which effectively impede both receiving and transmitting the Catholic faith and harm the unity of the Church.

8. For these reasons, we oppose the systematic elimination from Scripture translations, liturgical texts, hymns, homilies and general usage of 'man' as a generic. The claim that the language is "sexist" and that such changes are required as a sensitive pastoral response to women collectively is false. We believe that the symbolic effect of mandating such changes in the language and practice of the Catholic Church is negative and confusing, effectively undermining the authority of the Church and her hierarchy.

9. We also oppose changing the constant practice of the Church in such liturgical matters as acolytes or 'altar servers' and homilists, and repudiate the increasingly frequent practice of women saying parts of the Eucharistic Prayer with the priest or in his place or performing other liturgical functions reserved to ordained men.

10. We are grateful for the profound contribution of Pope John Paul II to our understanding of the meaning of human life and of the fundamental relationship of human beings with one another and with God through the many theological works he has given the Church during his pontificate, including his Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which help to deepen our understanding of the centrality of the role of Christian women to the Church's evangelical mission. Constantly seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit, and in solidarity with the Pope, the Bishops in union with him, and with the universal Church, we pledge to respond to our Christian vocation with wisdom, with love and responsibility.

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