
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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