
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