

VOICES VOICES VOICES



Vol. III, No. 3

Fall 1988

On the Dignity and Vocation of Women... Holy Father Responds to Concerns of All Women

Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women) provides the necessary theological framework for a "pastoral" (or practical) application to specific roles for women in the Church and in society. Dated Aug. 15, 1988, the Feast of the Assumption and the close of the Marian Year, the Letter appeared in translation in early October.

It is clear that the Pope's "anthropological and theological study" is intended to correct fundamental errors that have undermined an authentic Christian understanding of "the reason for, and the consequences of the Creator's decision that the human being should *always and only* exist as a woman or a man." These errors, prevalent in society today, have caused confusion and divisions within the Church and have led to the *real* oppression of men and women and their families.

The Pope's Response

Although *Mulieris Dignitatem* is most directly a result of the 1987 Synod on the Laity, where "women's issues" were discussed, the document also seems particularly relevant to North Americans in view of the appearance of the first draft of the U.S. bishops' pastoral on women earlier this

year, and of the Canadian bishops' infamous feminist "Green Kit" issued three years ago. It seems more than a coincidence that the Pope's letter, which was unexpected and "un-

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WFF 1988 Conference Report

Msgr. Kelly Receives Faith and Family Award

The Women for Faith and Family fourth annual conference, "Catholic Women and 'The Catholic Moment': Faith and Family in Action," was held in St. Louis Oct. 14-16. The conference featured speakers from the United States, Canada and England. Catholics from across the country attended to focus on problems facing the Church and family and to discuss the bishops' pastoral letter on women's concerns, "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption," and the Pope's recent letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women).

Msgr. George A. Kelly of St. John's University in New York received the 1988 Faith and Family Award for his contributions to the Church and the family over the past 40 years. Msgr. Kelly was director of education for the Archdiocese of New York under Cardinals Spellman and Cooke. Of his numerous books on the family, marriage and the Church, his best known is *The Battle for the American Church*.

Msgr. Kelly's keynote address, "Woman: Mother of Us All," included criticism of the Church's leadership in America. He observed that the leadership had failed to clearly define Catholic teaching in the face of the current feminist power struggle. Referring to Luther's revolt in Europe, Kelly reminded attendees that the Church got into frequent trouble because "pastors waited too long to clean up a messy situation close to home." He noted that today, almost 25 years after Vatican II, the Church has not yet begun to deal effectively with the abuses that followed in the wake of the

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The Committee of 100

An ad hoc "Committee of 100 Catholic Women" has issued a statement called "The Gift of Womanhood." The document was given to each bishop attending the November meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington DC. The 100 signers of the statement are all prominent Catholic women writers, heads of religious orders and leaders in lay organizations, pro-life groups, etc. Most (perhaps all) are AFFIRMATION signers as well. A complete text of the statement is printed inside. (See page 3.)

Inside VOICES

Thanks to you—to your prayers, donations and hard work, we have many encouraging things to report!

First of all, the fact that you have received this issue of **VOICES**—the third this year—shows that we are, with your help, making progress in our goal of improving communication with you. Because of your response, we are able to expand our mailing list by about 2000. We hope eventually to reach all **AFFIRMATION** signers with our **VOICES**, as funds permit. We are also hopeful that your response to this issue will enable us to continue **VOICES** on a quarterly basis next year. **Any donation**, however small, will keep you on our **permanent mailing list**. Some of you may be able to send smaller amounts several times a year. This really helps.

We also want you to know that your efforts to collect signatures to the **AFFIRMATION FOR CATHOLIC WOMEN** has produced **thousands more signatures**. Many people are hearing about this means of expressing fidelity to Church teachings and to the Holy Father for the first time and want very much to be a part of this positive movement. New signatures—and new requests for copies of the **AFFIRMATION** and other information—are coming in daily.

A lot of you have sent us copies of your responses to the bishops' pastoral on women and comments on "listening sessions" that you sent to the bishops' committee and to your bishop. All of these were thoughtfully written and certainly let the bishop know of your deep concerns. Some were so well written that we wish you were here to help us write this newsletter! We hope you will **keep up the effort** to make the voices of faithful Catholic women heard by writing letters-to-the-editor, to Church leaders and public officials on matters which involve the Faith and our families. **This can really help turn the tide!**

You may recall that in the last issue of **VOICES** we mentioned that we needed a word processor. Happily, we are able to report that we are now getting this equipment. We hope that it will be in place within the next month or so, and that we will quickly learn to use it.

We also need some additional filing cabinets and shelves, tables and other miscellaneous office equipment. Some of you have suggested that we'd be easier to reach if we had a WFF telephone listing, which would require installing a separate line. An answering machine and a Fax machine would be **really** useful. If you know of someone who has either they could donate, please let us know.

You may know of foundations to which we may apply for funds for the annual WFF conference, for the newsletter

project or other work we do. If you do, we would appreciate your letting us know. Fundraising is what we're worst at, so we hope some of you may have suggestions for us so that we can keep up our momentum and undertake some of the projects you have suggested that we have so far been unable to do because of lack of money.

At the recent conference, the matter of forming local chapters of WFF was raised and discussed. We do recognize the potential value of this and are seriously considering how we might do this. At present, our by-laws and our small all-volunteer staff simply do not permit the big administrative job this would entail. However, that does not mean we can do nothing to help you contact and form associations with other committed Catholic women in your area. We have always encouraged this activity and will help you in any way we can. In areas where this has already been done, we keep in close touch with the women and provide information and whatever help we can in meeting the needs of that locality. Contact us if you are thinking about forming such a group. If our situation changes to enable us to form actual chapters, your group could become the nucleus of this effort. **Please pray with us for guidance in this matter.**

One way to "start something" in your locality would be to have a "mini-conference." Many of you have expressed interest in organizing such a one-day meeting and we hope you will find the article inside helpful in planning. (See page 5.) One of these conferences has already been scheduled for May in the Baltimore/Washington DC area. We hope to have at least one on the West Coast and another one or two in the East during 1989. But it will be up to you. We are prepared to go where we are called, God willing! If you cannot have a mini-conference, perhaps your parish or organization would invite us to speak. We do this quite a lot, and it is also a good way of getting the word out.

On the **international scene**, you will be glad to hear that an active pro-life group in Manila has asked for information about organizing **Women for Faith and Family-Philippines!** **WFF-Canada** sent delegates to the 1988 WFF conference; **Connie Purdue of WFF-New Zealand** reports that about 1000 signatures to the **AFFIRMATION** have been sent to the Pope; and we have just received a list of 24 new **AFFIRMATION** signers from **South Africa**.

We have scheduled the 1989 WFF conference for Oct. 6-8 in St. Louis. Mark your calendars and stay tuned!

This has been a **very** full year for us. We know, however, that there will be much work to be done in 1989. As the Christmas season approaches, we particularly ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will constantly guide us and direct all our efforts toward genuine service to our Catholic faith, to our own families and to families everywhere. We hope you are planning some special spiritual preparations during the Advent season, along with all the other preparations we make at this time of year. As we get ready for the annual celebration of the First Coming of Our Lord and Savior, we keep in mind, also, that we must constantly prepare ourselves for His Second Coming. May we say in truly joyous expectation, **Maranatha—Come Lord Jesus!**

The entire St. Louis staff wishes each of you many blessings during the Christmas season and the coming year!

Helen Hull Hitchcock

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Quixotic Catholics (?) Call for Elimination Of Sexism in the Church by the Year 2000

"Catholics Speak Out" is the latest project of the Quixote Center, a homosexual advocacy group based in the Washington DC area. In a four-page advertisement in the Nov. 18 *National Catholic Reporter*, these "Catholics" issued their "Call to Eliminate Sexism from the Church by the Year 2000."

Citing the draft of the bishops' pastoral on women (PMR), they praised the document's acknowledgment that "discrimination based on sex is a sin which must be eradicated as 'contrary to God's intent,'" but faulted PMR for failing to contain a "plan of action" to eradicate the sin. The Quixote people advocated "a 10-year program of action to move our church [sic] decisively along the road to gender equality by the year 2000."

Predictably, the Quixote plan includes 1) a de-

On Rejecting First Drafts

Calling for a rejection of a Vatican "first draft" document on the authority of bishops conferences, Bishop James Malone (Youngstown, OH) told his fellow bishops at the November meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops that the Vatican's "initial working draft is too inadequate" to serve as a base for revision. Any accepted draft sets the stage, with its contents and limitations, for the final document. A set of misdirections here can skew the final product."

We might have hoped he was talking about "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption" (PMR) with this strong criticism. It is worth noting that the first draft of the bishops' pastoral on "women's concerns" was approved only by the NCCB Administrative Committee, not by the whole body of bishops. PMR was not discussed at the November meeting, and no vote was taken on it at the June meeting.

However, the "AIDS pastoral," remember, was. Archbishop Mahoney (Los Angeles) heads the NCCB committee to redraft the rejected "first draft" of the AIDS pastoral. This time, according to the Archbishop, it will be called HIV, not AIDS.

Meanwhile, back in the dioceses, officially generated "implementations" are already being promoted—of both "AIDS education" and recommendations of PMR (e.g. "altar girls") suggested by the unapproved draft pastorals.

The Catholic Forum--St. Louis

The Catholic Forum of St. Louis brings together area Catholics for first Friday benedictions and monthly meetings, lectures or seminars "to aid us in working out, in prayer and reflection, our Catholic vocations in today's 'post-Christian' culture."

Originally organized in 1983 as the Young Catholic Forum, the meetings and liturgies are now held at St. Louis University. Titles of lectures this fall have included "Is a Female Priesthood Possible?" and "Blessed Edith Stein and the Feminine Ethos."

For information about activities of this group, write CATHOLIC FORUM OF ST. LOUIS, c/o Robert Casteel, 4475 W. Pine Blvd. Apt 805, St. Louis, MO 63108.

mand for "generously funded" re-education programs; 2) revision of scriptural and liturgical texts, religious education materials, etc. to obtain "gender balance"; 3) ditto, Canon Law; 4) opening "all liturgical offices and ministries, including the diaconate, the ordained priesthood and the episcopate, equally to women and men"; 5) initiating "affirmative action" to "move women into decision-making positions equal to those of men at all levels of the U.S. Church"; and 6) that the U.S. Church "respond to the anguish reported in the U.S. Bishops' draft pastoral" and "dialogue" with the anguished about "sexuality, sexual orientation and reproduction."

The Quixote Center claims a membership of 5000. About 3000 of them paid \$10 each to sign this statement. Their motto, reprinted several times in the ad, is (no kidding) "By their fruits you will know them."

Advisory Committee Endorses Research Use of Aborted Fetuses

The use of aborted fetuses in research has been endorsed by an advisory committee of the National Institutes of Health. At a news conference on Oct. 21, members of the advisory panel released a draft document which said, "It is of moral relevance that human fetal tissue for research has been obtained from induced abortions. However, in light of the fact that abortion is legal and that the research in question is intended to achieve significant medical goals, the panel concludes that the use of such tissue is acceptable public policy."

We urge you to write to President Ronald Reagan (The White House, Washington DC 20500), to President-elect George Bush and to your congressmen calling to their attention the grave moral and ethical considerations of "harvesting" tissue from aborted fetuses.

An informative book on the subject is **Beyond Abortion: A Look at Fetal Experimentation** (Magnificat Press, P.O. Box 185, Avon-by-the-Sea, NJ 07717) by AFFIRMATION signer Suzanne M. Rini of Pittsburgh.

Family Life Lecture Series

A series of lectures on "Changing Values in American Family Life" will be held during the coming months at the Georgetown University Intercultural Center in Washington DC under the sponsorship of the Thomas More Society.

Dr. Allan Carlson, director of the Rockford Institute, initiated the series on December 8, 1988. A Lutheran layman, he is a recognized expert on the social history of the family. The Rockford Institute publishes a journal on contemporary issues relevant to the family.

Other speakers in the series will be Ann McLaughlin, Secretary of Labor, who will speak on "The Social and Economic Context of the Modern Family" in January 1989; Dr. Carson Daly, formerly of the University of Notre Dame; Dr. Louis Martz, Yale University; and Mrs. Wanda Spasowski, wife of the former ambassador from Poland.

The Gift of Womanhood

'Committee of 100 Catholic Women' praises Holy Father

In his magnificent apostolic letter on the vocation and dignity of women, Pope John Paul II admirably sets forth the scriptural and anthropological sources for understanding the gift of womanhood. The Holy Father's profound meditation on the perfect complementarity between men and women, the exalted role of women in salvation history and the special calling of women as virgins and mothers to make that "gift of self" which is completely expressed in Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Immaculate Mother give women of today a renewed sense of worth and destiny.

The recognition of the dignity of woman has been inextricably linked with Christian revelation. Among those cultures which have not yet been penetrated by the light of the Gospel, woman is submerged in an inferior status, often regarded as less than fully human, a mere object of possession and use.

Only with the advance of Christianity and with the transformation of culture and of the habits of mind and heart produced by the leaven of the Gospel does the dignity of woman find its affirmation. The signs of this affirmation are in the establishment of permanent monogamous marriage

"Only with the advance of Christianity...does the dignity of women find its affirmation."

and the exaltation of motherhood and virginity. Where Christian truth has shaped culture, these principles have been enshrined, and where these principles are honored, the dignity of woman has been secure.

In our time, a new phenomenon has emerged along with a rejection of Christian truth in formerly Christian cultures. This is a false feminism, blind to the authentic vocation of woman and the origin of that vocation in the mystery of Christ's love. Like the pre-Christian disparagement of womanhood, this false feminism recognizes human worth

only in masculine terms and masculine roles. It disregards or despises the maternal vocation, falling prey to a lust for power which is the antithesis of the feminine vocation of self-donation.

In its more extreme manifestations in our culture, this false feminism has spawned such aberrations as a revival of cultic paganism. Even in its less extreme forms, it pits women against men in a competitive struggle which contradicts that "original unity of man and woman" of which Pope John Paul has spoken so eloquently.

The fruits of this false feminism have not been greater dignity for women, but a reversion to those very indignities which characterized pre-Christian cultures. The evils of divorce, abortion, contraception and pornography, far from liberating woman, have made her once again an object of use. Competition for economic, political and cultural power has tended to fracture the solidarities of family, Church and society in which Christian women have found their vocation and dignity.

Saddest of all, the false feminism which has infected secular society is now creeping into the Christian community. The peace and unity of the Church is threatened by this alien ideology which spurns the inestimable gift of revealed truth in a misguided attempt to find some other source for the dignity of woman. Regretfully, we have observed even some of our pastors appearing to succumb before this false feminist spirit which has become such a powerful current in secular society.

It is for this reason that we express our heartfelt gratitude to our Holy Father for reaffirming the truth about man and woman. Throughout his pontificate--particularly in his commentaries on the Book of Genesis and the Gospel according to St. Matthew, in his apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio, in his encyclical letter on Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, and now, most pointedly, in his letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*--Pope John Paul has ceaselessly taught the truth about woman. We treasure his insights and pledge ourselves to striving to fulfill that vocation to which we are called in this era of peril and confusion.

Committee of 100 Catholic Women

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Anne Bannon, M.D.
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Tina Bell
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Mary Beth Bonacci
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Kathleen Sullivan
Margot Szews
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Sister Jeanne Tierney
Christine Vander
Bloemen
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Susan Waldstein
Jeannette Wansing
Kim Ann Wentz
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About WFF 'Mini-Conferences'

Many of you have expressed interest in holding one-day regional conferences in your own areas. This is a good way to promote interest in WFF activities and encourage fellowship among other women in your diocese who are concerned about faith and family. Here are some suggestions for planning a WFF "mini-conference":

Getting started—Contact WFF early to select possible dates and discuss speakers and format. Our schedule fills up, so you will need to do this before proceeding with other plans. A member of the WFF staff will attend and speak at your conference.

Location—Several months in advance of your target date you will need to find a place to hold the conference. This could be a hotel, church hall or school meeting room. Many large companies make meeting facilities available to local groups, as do most public libraries. In choosing a site, be sure to consider size, location, parking, safety, microphones and meal and/or beverage service. When you select a site, reserve the date. Until you have a confirmed meeting place for a specific date, no other plans can proceed.

Speakers, format—In addition to a speaker from the WFF staff, you may want to have other local or out-of-town speakers. We can suggest speakers, or you may have someone in mind. You may wish to focus on a particular theme or suggest topics on various faith and family issues. You may want your conference to be a "day of recollection." In any case, plan to have Mass in connection with the conference if at all possible. If there is no church near your meeting site, you will need to get special permission from your bishop to hold Mass outside a church. Arrangements will have to be made for the church and the celebrant.

Liturgies—As soon as your conference plans are firm, advise your bishop about the conference, location and speakers. Permission is required for clergy from outside the diocese to celebrate Mass. You will need to work with clergy (for example, the parish priest where Mass will be held) to plan the liturgy, arrange for music, intercessions, etc. If it is not possible to have Mass, other prayer services should be considered, such as Vespers or Matins, which should be conducted by a priest or a deacon.

Food, refreshments—If you are planning an all-day conference, some plan for lunch needs to be made. It is too time-consuming to go to outside restaurants. The simplest (and cheapest) would be a brown-bag lunch. Beverages could be provided. If kitchen facilities are available, you could do something more elaborate. You might investigate including the price of lunch in the registration fee and having a caterer prepare boxed lunches. A half-day event, morning or afternoon, eliminates the need to serve a meal. Coffee, tea or soda and snacks (like cheese and fruit or cookies) would provide a pleasant opportunity for attendees to socialize.

Publicity—As soon as your plans are confirmed, you should begin to publicize your conference. We can send names and addresses of all AFFIRMATION signers in your region (we need the zip codes in your area) so that you can mail flyers to them, giving all information about speakers, registration etc. All local media, including the diocesan newspaper, other local papers, radio and television stations, should get a news release with conference information well in advance of the event. We can help you write the news release, if you wish. Press interviews with conference speakers should be arranged, if possible.

Financing—Costs of the conference, including speakers' transportation, meals, lodging, honoraria, cost of meeting room rental, microphones, supplies, postage, food, etc. should be covered by registration fees and/or other funds available to you. WFF cannot

underwrite the costs of regional conferences at this time. Sometimes an individual ("angel") will agree to cover most or all of the conference expenses so that the registration fee can be lowered, allowing more people to attend. Another possibility is parish sponsorship. Sometimes this works out very well. Of course, the lower the registration fee, the more people can attend. Another consideration is baby-sitting. Many of "our women" are mothers of small children, who cannot attend unless they bring their babies.

A final word—Planning a conference is a lot of work, but a successful conference is worth the effort! Thoughtful advance planning can make the "work" fun as well as rewarding.

**Fifth Annual WFF
Conference**
—————
October 6-8, 1989
—————
**Chase Park Plaza
Hotel, St. Louis**
—————
**MARK YOUR
CALENDARS EARLY!**

Fox Holes Up; Starhawk Stars

Father Matthew Fox, a Dominican priest and founder of the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS) at Holy Names College in Oakland, CA, has been ordered "silenced" and to sever himself from the ICCS and the College by the Dominican Order acting on instructions from the Vatican.

According to a report in the *National Catholic Reporter* (Oct. 21), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has called Father Fox's major published work, **Original Blessing**, a "gratuitous and subjective interpretation of Christian spirituality" which is "dangerous and deviant." Concluding an investigation of the priest's activities conducted during the past several years, the Congregation insisted that Father Fox be silenced and demanded that he disassociate himself from the ICCS and a staff member, "Starhawk," an avowed witch.

The priest stated that his work was "too important" to obey the silencing order of the "neurotic Vatican," but has agreed to take a six-month leave of absence from ICCS. He also issued what he called a "pastoral letter" to Cardinal Ratzinger that was reprinted in its entirety in the *National Catholic Reporter* on Hallowe'en. The same journal also published an extensive interview with "Starhawk," who said that the "witchcraft" she espouses has nothing to do with devil worship, because she does not believe in either "the Christian God" or the devil.

Statement of Women for Faith and Family

Women for Faith and Family issued a press statement on the "Fox case" Oct. 21, which we reprint herewith.

"We strongly support the action of the Vatican in the case of Father Matthew Fox," said Helen Hull Hitchcock, director of Women for Faith and Family, an international movement of Catholic women which expresses fidelity to the Church and promotes better understanding of Church teachings.

"During the past few years we have received an increasing number of letters and telephone calls from women who are deeply concerned about the far-reaching influence of Father Fox's 'creation spirituality' on children who attend Catholic schools.

"We have also received many reports of workshops for

women based on Father Fox's ideas, and some women who have attended them report being alarmed by the strong sense of the occult which pervades these sessions. We believe these quasi-occult, quasi-feminist workshops and 'liturgies' are extremely damaging to Catholic women who seek authentic spiritual guidance and who expect Father Fox, a Catholic priest in good standing with his Dominican Order, to provide it.

"Families whose children have been exposed to 'creation spirituality' in Catholic schools by religion teachers who are heavily influenced by Father Fox's teachings often receive little support from clergy or diocesan officials for their objections, precisely because Father Fox is a 'priest in good standing.'

"We are convinced that Father Fox's Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality at Holy Names College in Oakland should be suppressed entirely, and that he should be permanently silenced. We fear that some Church leaders may not realize how pervasive Father Fox's theories have become. It is convenient to see his California-based Institute as affecting only a tiny minority of confused women. However, the courses taught at the ICCS are attended by clergy, women religious and others from all parts of the United States, who then spread these teachings throughout their dioceses. His seminars are held in Canada, Australia and Ireland, as well as in the United States.

"We hope that the Vatican's action will be a helpful beginning in discrediting the 'creation theology' and 'creation spirituality' of Father Fox and his disciples and will give support to Catholic parents whose children are entitled to authentic Catholic teaching from their schools.

"Father Fox's chief victims are women and children. We are grateful that the Vatican has once again responded to a situation which imperils the spiritual welfare of Catholic believers by defending those who are often unable to defend themselves."

Those of you who may have first-hand experience or direct evidence of the influence of "Creation Spirituality" activities in your area should consider contacting us and informing your bishop.

Letters from Rome:

Catholic Education and Parent's Responsibilities

Because authentic Catholic education of children is a chief concern of those who write to us, we reprint excerpts from a letter from Cardinal Edouard Gagnon of the Pontifical Council on the Family, with permission of its recipient.

"Familiaris Consortio" (N. 36) states that the right and duty of parents to educate their children is essential, original and primary, irreplaceable and inalienable. This doctrine is found in the Charter of the Rights of the Family (Article 5) [and] in Canon 226 §2 of the Code of Canon Law...

"Because they have given life to their children, parents have a most serious obligation and enjoy the right to educate them; therefore Christian parents are especially to care for the Christian education of their children according to the teaching handed on by the Church...

"...[ecclesiastical] persons are to assist the parents in fulfilling their sacred obligation and in executing their sacred right, not to take them over... In fact, Canon 776 commands

the pastor 'to promote and foster the role of parents in the family catechesis'...

"The role of the pastor, therefore, is to give a service of assistance by providing the parents with the means to form their child. The parents, however, are not obliged to accept this assistance if they prefer to exercise exclusively their obligation and right to educate their own children..

"Parents should keep in mind that though they have a natural right to teach their children, they must follow the teaching which is handed on by the Church and the particular norms published by competent authority for a suitable catechetical formation.

"Thus, so long as you are teaching the children the doctrine handed on by the Church and observe the norms I do not see how you can be denounced..."

We believe that the concrete information Cardinal Gagnon's letter contains may be helpful to parents and teachers alike.

Conference report--cont. from page 1

Council. He concluded his address praising Women for Faith and Family, noting that the underpinning of WFF's agenda is "the faith of your Church" and the concerns shaped by that faith.

Father Joseph Fessio, S.J., of Ignatius Press in San Francisco, critiqued the "women's pastoral" and compared it to Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women." He described the Pope's letter as a meditation based on the revealed truth of Scripture. Through many citations and examples of women throughout the Old and New Testaments, Father Fessio explained that the Pope shows how woman has a distinct and glorious mission within the fulfillment of her femininity, not the denial of it. Father Fessio pointed out that, unlike the bishops' pastoral, the Pope's letter was final, concrete and devoid of dissent and sexism.

Helen Hull Hitchcock, director of WFF, spoke on "Valiant Women, Vigorous Faith," encouraging women to use their gifts and talents in this time of religious and social crisis to "aid humanity in not falling." She cited the Blessed Mother, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Avila as examples of women who "responded to the trials and conflicts of their times with valor and determination."

Other speakers included Michael Schwartz, director of the Center for Catholic Policy in Washington DC, who discussed the rights of the family and how families will be affected by some pending federal legislation. The focus of his talk was an examination of the Act for Better Child Care (ABC) in the context of the Charter of the Rights of the Family, which was issued by the Holy See following the Synod on the Family.

Joanna Bogle, a British journalist and host of a radio program on BBC, addressed the conferees at a banquet Saturday evening. She spoke on the role of the family in restoring Christian culture through traditional celebrations of religious feasts and seasons.

Cornelia Ferreira of Toronto discussed problems faced by Canadian Catholic families in education of children, emphasizing "home schooling."

Masses for the conference were held at the St. Louis Cathedral. On Saturday, the Feast of St. Teresa of Avila, the principle celebrant and homilist was Father Fessio, substituting for Cardinal Carberry, who was ill. On Sunday, the Most Rev. Charles Koester (Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis) was the principal celebrant and homilist at the Cathedral Mass. A service of Compline was held at the hotel on Saturday following the banquet. Father Gregory Lockwood was assisted by Father Greg Morris, S.J.

About 125 people registered for the the conference. Participants came from Canada, Ohio, Illinois, Kansas, Arkansas, Texas, Iowa, New York, Washington DC, Virginia, California and Missouri. Exhibitors included the Daughters of St. Paul, Milles Jesu and Birthright.

The Saturday session of the conference opened with the reading of a message and Apostolic Blessing from Pope John Paul II, conveyed through Archbishop Pio Laghi (papal pro-nuncio to the U.S.). Other messages of encouragement were received from Cardinal John O'Connor (New York), Cardinal Bernard Law (Boston), Archbishop Anthony Bevilacqua (Philadelphia), Cardinal Augustine Mayer (Vatican Congregation on the Liturgy), Archbishop John L. May (St. Louis), Bishop James Sullivan (Fargo, ND), Bishop John Myers (Coadjutor Bishop of Peoria), and Lutheran Pastor Richard John Neuhaus, author of **The Catholic Moment**.

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On the Dignity of Women, cont. from p. 1

scheduled," arrived in the midst of the controversy over the U.S. draft pastoral. Undoubtedly, it will have a significant effect on the outcome of that pastoral, as was surely the Pope's intent.

However, the Holy Father is not merely addressing Catholics in the United States and Europe, where feminism has been heavily influential and particularly destructive. He is speaking to the **whole** Church. In the developing countries of the world, some not yet penetrated by the liberating truth of the Gospel, concern for the dignity and role of women exists on a quite different plane from that in the West, as was also made clear at the Synod on the Laity.

"From the beginning..."

Thus the Pope's letter is truly "catholic" (universal) and addresses the question of the dignity and responsibility of women at the most fundamental level. He returns to the beginning—to Genesis. He shows how the message of Christ contained in the Gospel "has as its background the whole of Scripture" and is the source of any true understanding about God's creation of human beings "as man and woman—in the *image of God* he created them."

Pope John Paul shows that sin, which can only be understood with reference to the Creator's will for man, is a rejection of God's gift to man in creating us "in His image and likeness" as man and woman. It is sin that disrupts the "original unity" of man and woman and damages or destroys the *mutual relationship of self-giving love* that God intended to exist in all human relationships.

"Two dimensions..."

The Pope describes the "two dimensions of women's vocation," motherhood and virginity, which were united in Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Son of God. Mary's obedient acceptance of God's will for her in becoming the mother of Jesus Christ who is "of one substance with the Father" (thus she becomes the "Mother of God") also makes her the

channel through which God establishes the New Covenant with humanity that was made necessary because of sin. The New Covenant is established through the redeeming sacrifice—the "self-giving love"—of Christ.

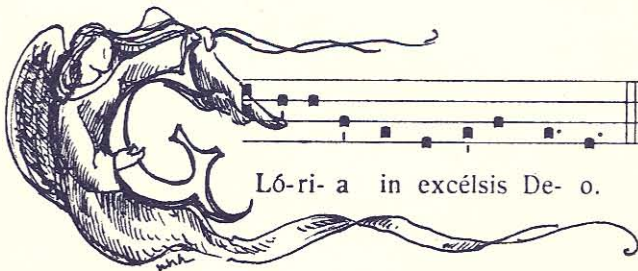
Through her motherhood, Mary "attains a *union with God that exceeds all the expectations of the human spirit*," and "the fullness of the perfection" of what is most essentially womanly or feminine. Mary also "*represents the humanity that belongs to all human beings*," for men as well as women. As "handmaid of the Lord" she accepts her mission of service to God's Kingdom and is a model for all Christians.

Jesus' action

The Pope describes the biblical accounts of Jesus' attitudes toward women and dismisses the argument that Jesus selected only male apostles (priests) because he was "culturally conditioned." This would contradict Jesus' way of acting, which was "free and sovereign" and frequently contradicted the world of His lifetime on earth. The Pope also offers a detailed but clear explanation of the relationship between Christ and the Church, using the "nuptial imagery" of Bride and Bridegroom; and he provides insight into biblical texts regarding the relationship of husbands and wives.

In setting forth the biblical and theological groundwork for understanding the meaning of human sexuality in a concise manner, the Holy Father has constructed a basic framework for the many pastoral applications that the imminently expected Apostolic Exhortation following the Synod on the Laity will undoubtedly contain.

Copies of **On the Dignity and Vocation of Women** are available from the Daughters of St. Paul, 50 St. Paul's Ave., Jamaica Plain, Boston, MA 02130. Women for Faith and Family is planning to make available a brief study/commentary on the Letter soon. Audio cassettes of **Father Joseph Fessio's** discussion of the letter and the American bishops' draft pastoral on women are available now. (See order form, page 7.) □



Ló-ri- a in excélsis De- o. Et in terra pax ho- mí-ni-bus bonae vo-luntá- tis.