

Appendix C

RESPONSE TO THE FIRST DRAFT OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS' PASTORAL RESPONSE TO WOMEN'S CONCERNS FOR CHURCH AND SOCIETY, *Partners in the Mystery of Redemption*

Preface. In the fall of 1988, John Boyle, President of the CTSA, appointed an ad hoc Task Force to respond to the Pastoral letter "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption." The five members of the task force (Ronald C. Chochol, Patricia Beattie Jung, Michael McGinniss, Susan A. Ross [Chair], and Mary Ellen Sheehan) each wrote an individual response, and the chair of the task force combined the responses into one report. What follows is a summary of the responses of the task force and of the membership of the CTSA who had responded to a June invitation of the President for the reactions of members at large to the draft. The text was reviewed by the Board of Directors of the CTSA, and some emendations in the text were made.

I. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE LETTER

The act of writing a pastoral letter is, in itself, an act of leadership. The task force applauds the leadership taken by the American bishops in this effort and hopes that other national bishops' conferences will respond with recommendations for their own countries. We note that this document is meant as a "beginning" and are pleased that this beginning identifies the sin of sexism and includes many laudable exhortations and recommendations regarding women's roles in society and church. The full possibilities, however, for this letter to offer leadership in the cause of justice for women are unrealized in part because of the lack of *specific* recommendations. The letter calls for no structure to continue the process of dialogue begun in the last 15 years and continued here, and the analyses of sexism in society and church are incomplete and lacking in intellectual rigor (see below on method). While recognizing the "honest, pastoral expression of [the bishops'] desire to learn from women and to respond to their concerns" (21), we felt that as long as the accent remains on the word *desire* and not on witnessing through concrete actions, the door is left open for a certain skepticism as to the letter's real value.

We were also concerned about the length of the letter (will this preclude the letter's having a wider readership?) and about its organizing principles. The chapter headings mix several different bases for division. For example, although Chapter One is entitled "Partners in Personhood," all the chapters actually deal with per-

sonhood. The same is the case with Chapter Two, since all the chapters deal with relationships. There are implicit philosophical assumptions in the division of the material that need to be critically examined.

In its response to the letter as a whole, the task force strongly recommends more concrete plans for action and implementation in the next draft.

II. METHOD

Much of the discussion in our Task Force concerned method: that is, the ways in which "Voices of Affirmation" and "Voices of Alienation" were expressed, and the ways in which "Reflection on our Heritage" was discussed. First, to the "Voices": We all agreed that it was good to include the words of women themselves. This lent vividness to the letter and demonstrated the variety of women's voices in the church. But we were concerned that the process of eliciting responses (the "listening process" done in advance of the letter) may have excluded certain "voices" from the letter (those who could not come to a session; representative numbers of minority women and women of color). We were also concerned that the identification of the "Voices of Alienation" might suggest only negative feelings towards church teaching and policy, when many of these "alienated voices" expressed prophetic concerns. In fact, many of these "Voices of Alienation" expressed not *alienation* but *fidelity* to the teachings of Jesus on the full equality of women as persons and the full acceptance of their gifts.

Moreover, the mere repetition of these voices cried out for critical reflection, evaluation, and analysis. The text would be greatly enhanced if it were to make some comment on how people came to diverge so drastically in their description and evaluation of the same or similar situations. The bishops need to do more than "hold up a mirror" to women's concerns. Rather they need to engage in a critical analysis of these concerns.

Secondly, the "Reflection on our Heritage" sections troubled all of the task force members. While the letter acknowledges the sin of sexism, and says that "sexist attitudes have colored church teaching and practice over the centuries and still to our day" (39), there is little recognition that many of these same attitudes have done *more* than "color" church teaching. In the past, the church has taught that women were subordinate to men at the very level of creation, that women were naturally inferior to men, and were thus unfit for certain roles or functions in church and social life. While the letter demonstrates that these teachings have been supplanted by more recent papal declarations, it is not clear that the previous teachings have been completely repudiated. It is evident from the testimony of many of the women quoted in the draft that these teachings have not been overcome in practice and, many women and men feel, in some parts of the church's authoritative tradition (for example, in women's exclusion from the priesthood).

Overall, these sections ("Reflecting on Our Heritage") describe the church's heritage in timeless and ontological terms which leave no room for reexamining the church's tradition. While the ambiguity of our heritage on the level of practice is repeatedly recognized (160, for example), the bishops set forth no clear evaluative framework for the critical reinterpretation of the tradition on the level of theory. Tradition is discussed as if it were largely irreformable, as in the discus-

sion of *Inter Insigniores* (217). While this document is a declaration of the constant tradition and present teaching of the church, *Inter Insigniores* by no means represents an infallible position which the church cannot reverse if more compelling reasons arise from continuing reflection on the tradition. We urge the bishops to suggest to Rome and to other episcopal conferences the pastoral need to review, in an appropriate context, the theology that excludes women from the priesthood. More *theological* reflection on these sections—that is, acknowledgement of the scriptural bases and philosophical, social, and historical assumptions inherent in church teachings—would enhance the document's value. We also urge the bishops to use relevant sources in addition to papal statements and Vatican II documents. Use of these latter sources as the overwhelming examples of the church's heritage is largely self-validating. We urge that more attention be given to historical analyses of the church's tradition, that the work of men and women scholars of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Catholic Theological Society of America, the Catholic Biblical Association, and the Canon Law Society of America be included as giving a critical perspective to the church's tradition as part of its heritage, and that, in general, the bishops apply a greater reflective awareness and intellectual rigor to these important sections on the church's heritage.

III. SPECIFIC ISSUES

1. Marriage, Motherhood, Family Life

Task force members were concerned about the theological anthropology expressed in those passages dealing with marriage, parenthood, and family life. The emphasis on women's "proper roles" and "proper nature" as "pertaining in a special way to the gift of motherhood" (34) drew criticism from all members. First, the Letter seems to suggest that "contemporary papal teaching" and "the church holds" are equivalent. Second, the papal teaching of women's "proper role" is representative of a particular theological understanding (phenomenologically influenced Neo-Thomism) which is not the "faith of the church." These passages (especially those on the family in Chapter Two) also stressed the roles of married women *in the home*, as if many married women do not choose to work outside the home. Married women were identified almost exclusively as mothers. The letter also suggests (in sections 90-103 and 120-28) that sexuality is the particular concern of women, when in fact it is the concern of *men and* women. The understanding of the human person implicit in these passages on "motherhood" suggests a static view of human nature, especially of women's nature, that needs to be informed by a more critical analysis of the church's tradition and of contemporary experience.

These sections on the family also suggested a model of family life that troubled members of the task force. When "motherhood" is held up as the primary role of women, this diminishes the role of "fatherhood," and the roles of those women who are not biological mothers. There is no criticism of the tradition's neglect of the role of fathers, and the bishops fail to develop fully the potentially countercultural character of fatherhood. In our culture, paternal devotion and care for children is undervalued while the economic contributions of men are overvalued. While we applaud the bishops' support of parental leave policies and health

care programs (113), we think that these sections offer an opportunity for the bishops to exercise prophetic leadership by making specific recommendations regarding marriage, the workplace, and social policy for families.

With regard to marriage, the bishops need to be more attentive to a developmental theology of marriage (especially in 81-82). Specific pro-family measures can be suggested here to support the laudable recommendations in 171. Such issues as flextime and parental leave should be supported by the bishops for both women *and* men. In doing so, the bishops would also be developing a more adequate theology of personal vocation (85) with regard to both motherhood and fatherhood. If the bishops wish to teach that through their parental obligations both fathers and mothers are partners with God in the mystery of redemption, then they must boldly and straightforwardly reform the theological and moral assumptions about the concerns, roles, and responsibilities of men.

2. *Women's Roles in the Church*

While we support the bishops' recommendation that women contribute to ministerial education (127), the language of the document suggests that women's contributions are in educating people in sexuality and marriage issues, which is a highly reductive position. In addition, the bishops state their resolve to work collaboratively with "women religious" (227). This again suggests that women's contributions to the church are found in limited areas: married women can educate with regard to marriage; religious women can work with church leaders. We urge the bishops to state their resolve to include *all* women (married, single, religious, divorced, etc.) in all the church's work. As theologians, we especially urge that the contributions of women theologians and biblical scholars be incorporated into the reflections of the bishops and the ongoing training of ministers, to name only two areas of church life. We regret the exclusion of women from and segregation within seminary student bodies, faculties, and formation teams and urge the bishops to take up these important matters with the authorities in Rome so that changes in church structures can include women to the extent recommended here (226). We support strongly the educative challenge of the bishops to clergy and laity (172-73).

We also draw the bishops' attention to the issue of language. While we all recognize the limitations of the letter and the constraints under which the bishops operate with regard to doctrine and practice, the bishops do have the power to make specific recommendations with regard to language, as they suggest in 229. We remind the bishops of their effort (in 1978) to issue a booklet on inclusive language and nonsexist catechesis and the unfortunate conclusion to that laudable effort. We urge that the bishops work to issue a set of guidelines on inclusive language, and to reconstitute the committee they themselves established 10 years ago to make these recommendations. We also urge that in the document itself, the language of "church" be clarified to speak of the entire people of God, and not be used ambiguously to speak of both the entire people and of the hierarchy (20, 23, 25).

On a more positive note, we applaud the effort of the bishops to be critical of the tradition as it has spoken of the ministry of women (205-207), and in the bishops' acknowledgement of men *and* women as Christ's "image and presence in

this world" (203). The New Testament evidence rehearsed by the bishops challenges the notion of an exclusively male apostolate in the primitive church, and suggests that this understanding of our heritage is not irreformable. That the bishops call for "further study" of women's roles in church ministry (218-23) is a courageous act, although one undermined by the largely uncritical recitation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's conclusions in *Inter Insigniores* (217). As noted above, we urge the bishops, in concert with Rome and other episcopal conferences, to undertake a thorough review of the theology of priesthood.

IV. SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS BY PARAGRAPH NUMBER

¶26 It was suggested that this really belongs in Chapter 2, since the specific issue at hand concerns the family. This recommendation also supports our suggestion for a more balanced understanding of *parenthood* as a vocation shared by both men and women.

¶34 The uncritical rehearsal of papal documents in this paragraph needs serious reexamination. The language presented here also contradicts what the bishops themselves say in 44, which emphasizes the diversity of women's gifts and contributions.

¶80 "The love of man and wife" should be changed to read "the love of husband and wife," because the former connotes a relationship of inequality.

¶81 This paragraph would benefit from amplification in the light of the complexities in the theology of marriage and divorce unearthed by exegetes and theologians.

¶82 This section needs to reflect the emerging view of the possibilities of dynamic growth in marriage.

¶84 This quotation from Pope John Paul II is problematic because it makes various uncritical assumptions about the roles of women as mothers and neglects to mention, e.g., the need children have for care, love, and affection from their fathers. In addition, some members of the Task Force and the Board thought that this statement focused too much on a particular (Western, industrialist) view of family life and urged that the bishops recognize the limitations of such a view. Others, however, thought that this picture was appropriate, given the American audience of the letter. We note the real divisions within our own organization and urge the bishops to reflect critically on these and other comments on the nature of western family life.

¶¶94-99 Given all that has been said about personhood, more needs to be said about the various dimensions of human sexuality.

¶104 It would be more correct to say that Mary was *virginal* but not *celibate* since the two states are not identical (Mary was married). Perhaps it might be more advisable to omit reference to Mary here.

¶107 It would be appropriate here to treat John 3:46-54 (*not* John 5: 46-54) as not necessarily historical, in the ordinary sense. We suggest something like "Jesus is remembered as one who held marriage in such esteem that he performed his first miracle. . . ."

¶¶111-19 We suggest that the bishops not simply "recommend" but rather suggest proposals for action that exemplify the church's commitment to families

(not *just* mothers). Here we encourage the bishops to speak of *women*, not only wives, mothers, and homemakers.

¶112 This is far too brief and far removed from what married people need to hear. It would, for example, be appropriate to mention the use of counseling in marriage and to acknowledge more fully a developmental theology of marriage.

¶121 This paragraph belongs in Section 3 ("Reflecting on our heritage"). It is also not clear whether the bishops are suggesting revising the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*.

¶162 The document would be enhanced considerably if this paragraph were taken seriously and more attention were given to spelling out the implications of this position. Moreover, this paragraph needs to be seen as applying to our *religious culture*, not just our *secular culture*. As such it would involve the important acknowledgement that various cultural patterns are human products, not God-given permanent structures of the human, within the church.

¶206 We suggest that the term "other" be inserted so as to say that "Christ . . . sent them to announce the news to the *other* disciples"; women *were* among the disciples, as the bishops themselves acknowledge.

¶216 We urge that the difference between the ministerial and common priesthood be more fully explained.

V. CONCLUSION

We acknowledge the legitimacy of the Letter's scope and character as a *beginning* in terms of inaugurating a necessary continuing process within the church as a whole. But it is also a significant shortcoming for the bishops not to acknowledge and give evidence of the dialogue and reflection on these issues that preceded the letter. We also note that the letter does achieve in many respects its stated purposes of reporting, reflecting, and responding. But in carrying out each of these purposes, there are also serious limitations, as indicated in part above, regarding the insufficiency of analysis and lack of a concrete program of action. The bishops may want to insist that this letter is primarily a pastoral response and not a theological reflection, but there *is* no legitimate pastoral response that is not at once a theological reflection and no legitimate theological reflection that is not also a pastoral response.

If the bishops are truly committed to overcoming sexism, then they have set for themselves a full agenda for the coming years, one item of which is their need for dialogue among themselves about the meaning and consequences of their own claims. The next draft of the letter must show deeper social analysis and theological reflection and be far more specific with respect to actions, lest the bishops' ability to act on what they have heard in the consultations and discerned from their own reflections be doubted by us who join them as the People of God in this crucial prophetic work.

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