

FAILURE OF THE EXECUTIVE POWER¹

"I bend my knee to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth takes its name."

Ephesians 3:14-15

It belongs to the father of a household to exercise discipline in his family. This is true equally of the household of the Church. The Pope and each of the bishops of the Church, indeed each priest, is a father in charge of a household. Each has duties to rule and govern his household with authority given him by God. If he fails in those duties the harm that results is as extensive as the reach of his authority.

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On 11th October, 1962, in his Opening Speech to the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII said this—

"In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life... We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand."

Almost fifty years later this declaration makes embarrassing reading. For the era *did* get worse. And those who foresaw ruin and disaster lived to see their prophecies realised. One statistic alone is telling: in the twenty years that followed 46,000 priests throughout the world abandoned their ministry²

Two Influences

It is two generations since these words were uttered and in that period the greatest harm in the Catholic Church has been wrought by two causes, two influences, working in tandem. One came from outside the Church. It was not the greater of the two but it had the greater effect because the other, from within, disposed the members of the Church to accept it.

The influence from outside the Church was Feminism, the ideology which seeks to reduce men and women to a common level. A corollary of Marxism, many of whose marks it bears; disposed for by the disorders wrought in society by two world wars; preached by the evil Sartre and his mistress, de Beauvoir, in the cafés of Paris; fed by that lack of sense of any values transcending the material which is the dowry of modern philosophy; adopted by the irreligious; vaunted as the wisdom hidden from all previous ages: this simplistic ideology took hold of modern thought and came at

¹ This is a revised version of a paper originally published on this website in August 2005.

² Figure quoted by George Weigel in *The Courage to be Catholic*, New York, 2002, p.27. It would seem to understate the position. Romano Amerio says that a comparison of figures published by the Secretary of State for 1969 and 1976 shows the number of priests fell in those seven years alone by 70,000: Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum, A Study of Changes in the Catholic Church in the XXth Century*, Sarto House, transl. from 2nd Italian Edition by Fr John P. Parsons, Kansas City, 1996, p.182.

last to infect the priests and bishops of the Catholic Church. But it would not have done so without the influence from within the Church which disposed many to accept its simplistic claims.

The second influence was the loss of the sense of discipline in the Church which began with remarks of Pope John XXIII made in the speech quoted above, the Opening Speech to the Second Vatican Council. The Pope said—

“The Church has always opposed... errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than the arms of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations. Not, certainly, that there is a lack of fallacious teaching, opinions, and dangerous concepts to be guarded against and dissipated. But these are so obviously in contrast with the right norm of honesty, and have produced such lethal fruits that by now it would seem that men of themselves are inclined to condemn them, particularly those ways of life which despise God and His law or place excessive confidence in technical progress and a well-being based exclusively on the comforts of life. They are ever more deeply convinced of the paramount dignity of the human person and of his perfection as well as of the duties which that implies. Even more important, experience has taught men that violence inflicted on others, the might of arms, and political domination, are of no help at all in finding a happy solution to the grave problems which afflict them.”

This paper will first consider the influence of these words. It will then consider Feminism and show how these two influences coalesced to produce the harm in the Church that has resulted.

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The Abdication Of Authority³

When, in the words quoted above, the Pope addresses error he uses the figure of speech called metonymy. The evil, ‘error’, stands for *the people affected by* the evil. When the Pope refers to *the arms of severity*, he is referring, metonymically again, to *discipline* of which severity is a quality. He refers to mercy. Mercy is sorrow at another’s misfortune accompanied by a desire to help him⁴. Condemnation of error is a work of mercy since, by exposing it for what it is, those labouring under it are corrected and others are preserved from falling into it. It makes no sense, then, to juxtapose discipline to mercy when discipline is itself a part of mercy. Whatever the weakness in his reasoning, the Pope’s words established as a principle the renunciation of the Church’s authority to discipline the erring.

After this the Pope went on to assert something novel in the history of the Catholic Church, that the men of the present age enjoyed a wisdom that those of former ages had not. This was a remarkable claim when weighed against the constant teaching of the Catholic Church on the effects of Original Sin in the human soul, the wounds of

³ I have adopted in large measure the studied analysis of John XXIII’s speech by Italian theologian Romano Amerio in his *Iota Unum*, op. cit., pp. 79-82.

⁴ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.30, a.1.

ignorance, malice, weakness and desire, wounds compounded by other sins.⁵ Almighty God formed the Catholic Church, a Divine thing in the midst of the mundane, precisely to deal with those wounds, to provide inspiration, to heal, to direct, to bring peace and to lead to heaven. The Pope seemed almost to be denying the efficacy of that teaching. Experience has given the lie to the Pope's claim. Indeed, *history... the teacher of life* ought to have warned him, if Catholic doctrine had not, that the claim was ill founded and naïve. Less than eight months later he was dead. But his legacy has lived on to work harm in the lives of the Catholic faithful.

Italian theologian, Romano Amerio, provides this analysis of the late Pope's proclamation—

"The general effect of renunciation of authority is to bring authority into disrepute and to lead it to be ignored by those who are subject to it, since a subject cannot hold a higher view of authority than authority holds of itself."⁶

Once the Pope failed to act up to his name *il Papa*—the father—other fathers, bishops, priests and laymen, would fail in sympathy. And this bad example would carry over to the world outside the Church.

The Influence Of Feminism⁷

Feminism is founded on the assertion of a simple equality between men and women, on the face of things an attractive proposition. It says that men and women have equal rights; that they are equally talented in every respect, whether at the material level or the spiritual, at the physical level or the psychological. Women have hitherto been oppressed by men, Feminism asserts, and their rights suppressed. This is why they have been unable to achieve the same status as men in work and in social and public life. Women must, so the argument goes, struggle to throw off this oppression imposed on them for so long.

Feminism is a materialist ideology. It ignores, as does Marxism from which it draws its energy and characteristic antipathy, essential distinctions. It sees success only materially, the achievements written on the pages of history the only desiderata, the things done behind the scenes as beneath dignity. It exalts pride: it derides humility. The only ends worth pursuing are those which men pursue. Women, the thesis proceeds, have been conditioned to believe that they are incapable of performing the activities or achieving the ends that men achieve. They must put aside that conditioning. A paradox follows: while Feminists are loud in their call for 'women's rights', they are not seeking 'women's rights' at all but 'men's rights'; that is, the right to conduct themselves as men.

From its insistence on this one idea, simple equality between the sexes, the ideology spreads its influence throughout society. It begins with woman, but because she is at the heart of mankind, it affects her husband and, more significantly,

⁵ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.85, a.3.

⁶ *Iota Unum*, op. cit. p.147

⁷ The writer has written elsewhere on the ideology of Feminism and its destructive effects on society. See the paper *Feminism* at <http://superflumina.org/feminism.html>. Much of what follows is taken from that paper.

her children. It brings a revolution in the way men and women regard each other, and attacks the structure of the family.

The Feminist assertion is wrong. While men and women are equal, *they are also unequal*.⁸ They are equal in that they are persons with all the rights and duties that attach to the person: they are unequal in that their ordinations differ fundamentally. Their equality is not a simple but a *proportional* equality. Woman, taken in relation to the rights and duties that attach to womanhood, is equal to man taken in relation to the rights and duties which attach to manhood.

This distinction in ordinations, a difference placed in them by their Author, determines the relationship between them. Ordination signifies 'end'. There is an end proper to the man and another, not identical, end proper to the woman. Separate man from the ordination proper to him, separate woman from the ordination proper to her, and you do violence to each and to society of which they constitute the elements. There follows confusion over what constitutes masculinity and femininity.

The father is the head of the family as the mother is the heart. Feminism denies to a man the authority to guide, to govern, to be a provider, to protect, to be the head of his family. It denies he has authority over his wife and his children, in flat contradiction of Divine revelation⁹, discouraging men from the virtue proper to manhood of *fortitude*, the courage to cope with the demands of a hard life, to exercise his true vocation as leader and father, to shoulder responsibilities. Just as Feminism has moved many women to adopt the mindset and the habits of men, it has moved many men to adopt those of women—to become effeminate.

Through its attack upon the subordination of wife to husband Feminism attacks Christ and his Church. St Paul teaches—

"Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, since as Christ is the head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife; and as the Church submits to Christ, so should wives to their husbands, in everything." [Ephesians 5: 23-24]

Feminism denies that a wife is subject to her husband: hence it must deny that the Church is subject to Christ. This is the reality behind the Feminist complaints that the Church is 'paternalistic' and represses women. The attack on Christ encompasses the Church's hierarchical structure. Feminism attacks the Pope as the Holy Father of all the people of God; the bishops as fathers in their dioceses; priests as fathers in their parishes.

⁸ Although he was not addressing the claims of Feminism, which was still in the stages of gestation in his day, Pope Leo XIII spoke to the point when, in *Humanum Genus*, he wrote: [N]o one doubts that all men are equal one to another so far as regards their common origin and nature; or the last end which each one has to attain; or the rights and duties which are thence derived. But as the abilities of all are not equal, as one differs from another in powers of mind or body, and as there are very many dissimilarities of manner, disposition and character, it is most repugnant to reason to endeavour to confine all within the same measure, and to extend complete equality to the institutions of civil life. [n. 26]

⁹ Cf. Ephesians 5:22; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 3:18; 1 Timothy 2:12; Titus 2:4, 5

Feminism's simplistic ideas and arguments have penetrated every level of society. They could have been countered effectively if the wisdom to do so had been exercised as it should. The fount of this wisdom, since it is of God, lies within the Catholic Church. Yet the authorities in the Church have not seen fit to address Feminism's follies, much less to take resolute action to isolate and condemn them. Instead, a large number of bishops and cardinals have embraced them. The late Pope John Paul II endorsed them, only excepting from this their logical consequences—contraception, abortion, and the inclination to effeminacy.

To the failure by the Pope to exercise his proper authority as father of the faithful, then, in a sort of malevolent fortuitousness, was added Feminism's attack on the authority of the father in his household. Little wonder many priests and bishops came to refuse to exercise in their own households the duties proper to their state; declined from the virtues proper to fatherhood of manliness, courage and authority; became effete in the exercise of their office, ceding to women the conduct of certain of their priestly functions and authority; and, finally, argued for bestowing, if it were possible, the priesthood of Jesus Christ on women.

The Effects

The consequences of this executive paralysis have manifested themselves at every level of the Church's hierarchy, papal (including the Vatican dicasteries), episcopal and clerical, for close on fifty years. They have been felt most strongly at the parish level where the perception of the priest as father of his people has largely been lost. There are few priests who know and understand that despite the negligences of the Catholic hierarchy the priest is the father of his parish and has the rights and duties of that office. Even fewer realise how they must juggle the exercise of their rightful authority with the knowledge that they will not be supported in the exercise of it by their bishop—that they must *be as wise as serpents yet as harmless as doves*.¹⁰

As a general rule, the Catholic faithful throughout the world—those who not only profess all the truths of the Catholic faith but practice them¹¹—live in a state of perpetual exasperation over episcopal negligence. They look to their bishop for leadership, but in vain. They look to him to act to uphold the teachings and practice of the faith, again in vain. There is almost a terror amongst the Catholic episcopacy of being seen to be acting with authority. Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska, in the United States, stands out among the bishops of the western world for doing so. He is treated as a pariah by many of his fellow bishops in consequence.¹² The current scandals in the Church over episcopal failures to act on sexual abuses carried out by members of their clergy are merely the fruit of this neglect of duty in one area, a notable area, of morality.

¹⁰ *Matthew* 10: 16

¹¹ The distinction is between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis*. Many proclaim their orthodoxy, but fail when it comes to living out their alleged faith.

¹² Witness the disavowal of his Mandate to the members of his diocese dated 19th March 1996 by American Cardinals Bernardin, Mahoney and Law.

Paul VI

The abdication of authority mandated by John XXIII flourished under Paul VI. In his book, *The Courage to be Catholic*¹³, George Weigel addresses the failures of the American bishops over the systematic neglect of their duties. He deals with the problems of the 1960s and 1970s following the Second Vatican Council, “problems,” he says, “exacerbated by what often seemed to be uncertain papal leadership during the fifteen year pontificate of Pope Paul VI (1963-1978).”¹⁴ In three of his actions in particular the abdication of authority by Paul VI appears forcefully.

The first was his failure after the receipt by him in mid 1966 of a report from the *Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, the Family and Birth*, to rein in false expectations among the faithful of an imminent change in the Church’s teaching on contraception. This was fuelled by the actions of certain theologians associated with the Commission in leaking one of the Commission papers favourable to change to *Le Monde* in France, *The Tablet* in Great Britain, and the *National Catholic Reporter* in the United States in April 1967.

Two years were to pass before the Pope addressed the issues definitively in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. There never was any doubt as to how the Pope would rule on this issue. Eminent American moral theologian, Fr John C. Ford S.J., expressed it trenchantly when he remarked that if the Pope had ruled in any other way than he had, he, Fr Ford, would have had to leave the Church. The failure of the Pope to warn the faithful of the falsity of these hopes—to act as a true father—caused incalculable harm.

The second turned on the procurement by Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, Paul VI’s emissary, of the withdrawal of József Cardinal Mindszenty, Primate of Hungary from the American embassy in Budapest. After his imprisonment by the Communist authorities and condemnation in a show trial repudiated by the free world, the Cardinal took the opportunity presented by the 1956 Hungarian uprising to take refuge in the American embassy. He remained there for fourteen years, a thorn in the sides of the Communist regime and of Communist fellow travellers within the Vatican. These prevailed upon Paul VI to seek his removal.

In the course of negotiations with Cardinal Mindszenty to secure his removal, Casaroli hid from him that one of the terms to which the Vatican had agreed with the Communists was that it would ensure he would do or say nothing that could displease the Hungarian government. On his arrival in Rome on 29th September, 1971, Paul VI assured him—

“You are and remain Archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary. Continue working, and if you have difficulties, always turn trustfully to us.”

When the Cardinal endeavoured to exercise his authority he was hindered at every turn. When he learned subsequently of the secret undertaking he remarked—

¹³ *The Courage to be Catholic*, Perseus Books, New York, 2002

¹⁴ *Ibid* p.67

“Had I known about any guarantee of this sort, I would have... asked the Holy Father to rescind all the arrangements that had been made in conjunction with my departure from Hungary.”

The actions of the Pope’s emissary are, of course, attributable to the Pope.

The third was the failure of Paul VI over what came to be known as ‘the Washington Case’. The details are set forth in *The Courage to be Catholic*¹⁵. Priests of the Archdiocese of Washington joined the public dissent against *Humanae Vitae*. With commendable application Patrick Cardinal O’Boyle issued a number of warnings and subsequently disciplined nineteen of his priests over the issue, suspending several of them. The priests publicised their cases and appealed to the authorities in Rome. After intervention by the head of the Congregation for the Clergy, John Cardinal Wright, Cardinal O’Boyle was persuaded to lift the sanctions against such of the priests who would agree to certain findings of a report by the Congregation. Those findings did not require the priests to repudiate their dissent or to affirm the teachings in *Humanae Vitae*. Weigel remarks—

“According to the recollections of some who were present, everyone involved understood that Pope Paul VI wanted the ‘Washington Case’ settled without a public retraction from the dissidents because the Pope feared that insisting on such a retraction would lead to schism.”¹⁶

This failure in exercise of authority had the most scandalous effect, as Weigel goes on to explain—

“Theologians, priests and nuns who publicly dissented from *Humanae Vitae*... were encouraged by the Truce of 1968 to continue, even amplify, their dissent... [It] taught the Catholic bishops of the United States that the Vatican would not support them in maintaining discipline among priests and doctrinal integrity among theologians... Catholic lay people also learned something from the Truce of 1968, even if they [had] never heard of it. The tacit vindication of the culture of dissent during the *Humanae Vitae* controversy taught two generations of Catholics that virtually everything in the Church was questionable: doctrine, morals, the priesthood, the episcopate, the lot.”¹⁷

An instance, from the other side of the world serves to illustrate its effect—

At a clergy conference in Hobart [Tasmania] on November 6, 1968, a senior priest from the North West coast moved that the priests send an assurance of their acceptance of the Encyclical and their complete obedience to the Pope. During heated discussion which followed, [Archbishop Guildford] Young was accused of lack of leadership. In an emotional speech he summarised statements from world hierarchies on freedom of conscience and claimed he had saved Australia from the ‘Alice in Wonderland’ situation which had arisen in the Washington (U.S.A.) Archdiocese of Cardinal O’Boyle. ‘One day,’ he said, ‘the full story would be told.’ He refused to accept the motion.”¹⁸

A former priest of the Hobart Archdiocese who had known Archbishop Young well told this commentator and others in a private meeting that the Archbishop suffered

¹⁵ Ibid pp. 68-72

¹⁶ Ibid pp.69-70

¹⁷ Ibid pp.70-2

¹⁸ *The Wisdom of Guildford Young*, W.T. Southerwood, Stella Maris Books, George Town, Tasmania, 1989, p. 419.

great anguish when in the last years of his life he came to realise the error of his views on conscience with respect to *Humanae Vitae*.

John Paul II

Karol Wojtyla, who became on 16th October 1978 Pope John Paul II, was a stronger character than Giovanni Battista Montini, Paul VI. He brought to the office of Pope an unbounded admiration for his predecessors.—

“I chose the same names that were chosen by my beloved Predecessor John Paul I... I wish like him to express my love for the unique inheritance left to the Church by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI and my personal readiness to develop that inheritance with God’s help...” (*Redemptor Hominis*, 4.3.1979)

Regrettably, this inheritance included the inclination to refrain from executive action. There are any number of instances of this throughout the twenty six and a half years of his pontificate. What follows is a sample.

* Swiss theologian, Hans Küng, denied 1) the divinity of Christ, 2) the bodily Resurrection of Christ, 3) that Christ founded an institutional Church, 4) that the Mass is the re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary. He called for a revision of Church teaching on papal infallibility, on contraception, on mandatory celibacy for priests. The Vatican put up with 15 years of his recalcitrance before it took action against him. On 18th December 1979 the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith withdrew Küng’s *missio canonica*, stating that he could *no longer be considered a Catholic theologian nor function as such in a teaching role*. Küng was not suspended; he was not excommunicated. He continued to be free to celebrate Mass, to hear confessions, to preach and to advise, notwithstanding his rejection of the Pope’s infallible teaching in 1994 against the ordination of women.¹⁹

* Richard P. McBrien, Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, was another described as ‘a priest in good standing’, a priest of the Archdiocese of Hartford, Connecticut. He was responsible for detailed and consistent dissent from the teachings of the Catholic Church over more than 20 years. His misnamed book *Catholicism* went to a third edition. The work was theologically defective in 1980. It remains so. Among other things he teaches that 1) Christ did not found the Catholic Church; 2) though He was God, Christ could have sinned; 3) Christ’s death was not a sacrifice but a peace offering; 4) Christ was ignorant of who He was. He casts doubts on the perpetual virginity of Our Blessed Lady. He teaches that papal judgments in matters of faith and morals (if not infallibly proclaimed) do not bind the consciences of the faithful and that the sinfulness of contraception and homosexual acts are to be left to the supremacy of the individual conscience.

* American priest, Charles Curran, was permitted to teach error for close on 20 years. The following extract from his curriculum vitae is taken from an advertisement placed in the *Rochester Democrat-Chronicle* by a group of concerned Catholics of the American Diocese of Rochester in 1986—

¹⁹ Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 22nd May 1994.

“Since his 1968 dissent from *Humanae Vitae*, Fr. Curran has repeatedly undermined Catholic teaching on faith and morals, giving scandal to faithful Catholics in this Diocese and throughout the world. In his writings and lectures, he has contradicted Catholic doctrine on premarital sex, masturbation, contraception, abortion, homosexuality, divorce, euthanasia, and in vitro fertilization.”

* Peter Leo Gerety was appointed Archbishop of Newark, New Jersey, in June 1974. He sponsored the Call To Action movement which supports birth control, homosexuality and lesbianism, rejected papal infallibility and encouraged Charles Curran to teach in his Archdiocese. His conduct was an open scandal in the Church in the United States.

* In July 1983, Cardinal Silvio Oddi, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, addressed a public meeting in Arlington, Virginia, in the USA. He was pressed as to why the Holy See did not remove people such as Curran and did not correct and disavow bishops such as Gerety. The Cardinal replied with words which reflected precisely John XXIII’s abdication of authority—

“The Church no longer imposes punishments. She hopes instead to persuade those who err... The Church believes it is better to tolerate certain errors in the hope that when certain difficulties have been overcome, the person in error will reject his error and return to the Church.”

The advertisement in the *Rochester Democrat-Chronicle* quoted above was placed there on March 23rd, 1986. The Catholics of the Diocese of Rochester were doubtless voicing their frustration at the inaction of authorities of the Church when they added to what is set out above—

“It has been an intolerable situation that Fr. Curran has been allowed to teach in the name of the Catholic Church while denying its teachings.”

Their efforts eventually bore fruit. In July of the same year the Vatican acted by stripping Curran of his status as a theologian. It had taken them seven years to move Rome to act. In the same year the Vatican forced Archbishop Gerety to withdraw his *Imprimatur* from a questionable catechetical text called *Christ Among Us*. Gerety did so but tendered his resignation from the Archdiocese of Newark with effect from June 1986, two years before he was due to resign.

* The Church suffered persistent problems with the bishops of Germany in the 1990s. In 1993 three of them gave permission for divorced and remarried Catholics to receive Holy Communion as long as they believed in conscience that their first marriage was invalid. Here was another instance of the plague that has afflicted the Church since Karl Rahner first exalted conscience above the authority of the Church in 1968 in his commentary on *Humanae Vitae*.²⁰ It took a year of negotiation with the Vatican before these bishops would agree to cease giving this permission.

In 1998 the Vatican had to take the German bishops to task again. According to German law no woman may submit herself for an abortion unless she has a

²⁰ Rahner’s assertion of the primacy of conscience over the teaching of the Church is simply a restatement of the assertion of Martin Luther. It is fundamentally Protestant.

certificate indicating that she has attended for counselling. The German bishops were providing such certificates and, in doing so, giving proximate, material (that is, culpable), cooperation to the killing of the unborn. Again the issue was settled, not by a peremptory directive from Rome backed by the threat of sanction, but by negotiation.

* Throughout the course of John Paul II's pontificate, of the many who might have been, only one theologian was ever excommunicated, Fr Tissa Balasuriya OMI, in Sri Lanka in January, 1997. The excommunication was lifted a little over a year later, not on the terms laid down by the Vatican, but on terms insisted upon by the offender and accepted by the Vatican. Fr Balasuriya is reported to have said subsequently that he had not taken anything back.

There were any number of admirable directives from Rome during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II: amongst them—

- the instruction *Inaestimabile Donum* (17.4.1980) concerning worship of the Eucharist within and outside Mass;
- the apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (22.5.1994) reserving priestly ordination to men alone;
- the reply to a *Dubium* concerning the teaching in this apostolic letter affirming that the teaching belonged to the deposit of faith (28.10.1995);
- the instruction regarding collaboration by the laity in the sacred ministry of priests (15.8.1997);
- the motu proprio *Ad Tuendam Fidem* (28.5.1998) strengthening the force of certain provisions in the Code of Canon Law;
- the declaration *Dominus Jesus* (6.8.2000) reaffirming the unicity and universal salvific effect of Jesus Christ and His Church in the face of theories seeking to justify religious pluralism;
- the motu proprio *Misericordia Dei* (7.4.2002) addressing abuses of the Sacrament of Penance particularly ceremonies of so called 'general absolution'.

Yet these directives were rarely enforced by any exercise of executive power.²¹ The result was that the despite these, and many other documents issued by the late Pope and the Vatican dicasteries, abuses continued more or less unabated. All the words in the world achieve nothing unless they are borne out by action. The wise father does not waste his time speaking to his disobedient child. He acts.

The extent of the executive paralysis in the Vatican is manifested most tellingly, perhaps, in the following admission by Msgr Camille Perl, Secretary of the Pontifical *Ecclesia Dei* Commission, to a member of the Lefebvrist faithful and reported by the Lefebvrist bishop, Bernard Fellay, in an address he gave in Kansas City, Missouri on 7 January 1999, to members of the Society of St Pius X—

²¹ An exception was the excommunication on 5th August 2002 of seven women who had undergone a purported 'ordination' in June 2002. The excommunication was confirmed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 21st December 2002.

“One of our faithful in France wrote a letter to Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger describing the scandalous behaviour of a particular French bishop. On behalf of the Cardinal, Msgr. Perl answered, ‘Yes, you’re right. The situation in the Church is anarchy. If you expect that an order from Rome regarding the above will solve the situation, you are in total illusion.’”

The so-called theologians, Küng, Curran, McBrien and their ilk continued to spread their errors. What they taught is not Catholicism but some religion of their own devising; yet they have been allowed to continue to mislead the faithful. Any suspension of the ability of one or other to teach in Catholic institutions achieves little without explicit condemnation accompanied with either suspension *a divinis* or excommunication. The faithful are infected with the illegality of the age and, in the absence of action by the leaders of the Church to enforce her authority, they see no danger to their immortal souls in continuing to favour false teachers like these.

John Paul II and Feminism

Pope John Paul II brought to the office of the papacy a philosophical inheritance which inclined him to accept the tenets of Feminist ideology.²² He endeavoured to apply them in a radical attempt to re-interpret sacred scripture.

Before proceeding we should address the concerns of those who might be scandalised at the assertion that a Pope may err. Every Pope is human; he can, and often will, commit error. The definition of the First Vatican Council, in setting out the precise circumstances in which a pronouncement of the Pope bears the character of infallibility²³, concedes implicitly *that apart from these circumstances he may err*. Pope Benedict XVI summarised the situation in an impromptu address to the priests of Aosta on 29th July 2005: *The Pope is not an oracle; he is infallible in very rare situations...* George Weigel quotes Melchior Cano, theologian to the Fathers of the Council of Trent, to the point—

“Peter has no need of our lies or flattery. Those who blindly and indiscriminately defend every decision of the supreme Pontiff are the very ones who do most to undermine the authority of the Holy See—they destroy instead of strengthening its foundations.”²⁴

The Pope cannot, in pursuit of some personal preoccupation, depart from the Church’s constant teaching. He may not, for example, infer that baptism is no longer necessary for salvation; or say that Adam was not created by God before Eve; or deny that Eve was formed from Adam’s body. Should he express views along these lines, they cannot be a valid exercise of his authentic teaching authority.

²² Cf. *Message for Celebration of World Day of Peace*, 1.1.1995; *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday*, 25.5.1995; *Message to Mrs Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women*, 26.5.1995; *Letter to Women*, 29.6.1995.

²³ ‘...when in discharge of the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church...’ Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, n. 1839.

²⁴ Melchior Cano, quoted in *Witness to Hope, The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, George Weigel, New York, 2001, p.15.

Teaching from 1979 Wednesday Audiences—on Genesis

There are in the Book of *Genesis* two accounts of creation, one each in Chapters 1 and 2. In the catechesis in his 1979 Wednesday Audiences Pope John Paul II compared these two accounts. He said—

“the first account... the one held to be chronologically later, is much more mature both as regards the image of God, and as regards the formulation of the essential truths about man... [It] is concise, and free from any trace whatsoever of subjectivism.”²⁵

In this first account there was not, what he called, “the problem of solitude...man is created in one act as ‘male and female’.”²⁶ In the second chapter of *Genesis* he said—

“The woman is made ‘with the rib’ that God-Yahweh had taken from the man. Considering the archaic, metaphorical and figurative way of expressing the thought, we can establish that it is a question here of homogeneity of the whole being of both.”²⁷

His conclusion of the comparative study of these two accounts of creation was that after God had cast a deep sleep over him—

“the first man, awakens from his sleep as ‘male and female’.”²⁸

Or, to express it in terms which he said accorded with the first chapter of *Genesis*—

“man, in fact, is ‘male and female’ right from the beginning.”²⁹

A little later he expounded the thesis in this way—

“[M]an became the ‘image and likeness’ of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning... Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion...”³⁰

Insofar as this teaching can be understood it seems irreconcilable with Catholic doctrine that the first man, Adam, was first created by God and the body of the first woman, Eve, was formed from his body.

Teaching in Mulieris Dignitatem—on Genesis

In August, 1988, in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the Pope built upon this foundation. In n. 10 he said—

“[The words *Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you* (*Genesis* 3:16)] refer directly to marriage, but indirectly they concern the different spheres of social life: the situations in which the woman remains disadvantaged or discriminated against by the fact of being a woman.”

He went on to endorse what he called—

“the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words ‘He shall rule over you...’”

Elsewhere in the same section he described this subordination, ordained by God, as indicating—

“the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality which the man and the woman possess in the ‘unity of the two’.”

²⁵ General Audience 12.9.1979. Reproduced in *Original Unity of Man and Woman—Catechesis on the Book of Genesis*, 1981, pp.22, 23. Also at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/jp2tb2.htm> The content of the various Audiences can be found by exploring this website.

²⁶ General Audience 10.10.1979. *Original Unity of Man and Woman* etc., op. cit., p. 45.

²⁷ General Audience 7.11.1979. *Original Unity*, p. 65.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Original Unity*, p. 61

³⁰ *Original Unity*, pp. 73-4.

This teaching appeared to enlarge the discordance with the Church's teaching for now it bore upon the doctrine of Original Sin and seemed to contradict the Church's teaching about women manifest in—

Genesis 2:18—“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Tobit 8:6—“You made Adam and you gave him a wife, Eve, to be his help and support...”

Ecclesiasticus 17:5 in the Vulgate—“Out of (Adam) he created a helper similar to him.” and in

1 Corinthians 11:9—“[I]t was not man that was created for woman's sake but woman for man's.”

Teaching in Mulieris Dignitatem—on Ephesians Ch 5

In n. 24 of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, referring to St Paul's admonition in *Ephesians* 5:22-23: “Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of his wife...”, the Pope said—

“The author knows that this way of speaking, so profoundly rooted in the customs and religious tradition of the time, is to be understood and carried out in a new way: as a ‘mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ’...”

There is no objective evidence to support this gloss. St Paul does not say there is to be mutual subjection of husband and wife. His words are clear: *Let women be subject to their husbands...* Verse 21 is adjectival to the content of the previous paragraph which deals with general admonitions. The sentence is grouped this way in the Latin Vulgate, the only edition of Sacred Scripture the Church has declared to be authentic.³¹ The verbs in verses 19, 20 and 21 of *Ephesians* 5 in the original Greek are all in the present imperative participle—*Speaking to yourselves... singing and making melody in your hearts... Giving thanks always... Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ*. The verb in verse 22, in contrast, is in the present subjunctive—*Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord*. St Paul is dealing with a different subject.

The sense in which the passage has been consistently interpreted by the Church appears, for example, in the following extracts from the Catechism of Trent—

“It is the duty of the husband to treat his wife generously and honourably. It should not be forgotten that Eve was called by Adam his companion. The woman, he says, whom you gave me as a companion. (Gen.3:12). Hence it was, according to the opinion of some of the holy Fathers, that she was formed not from the feet but from the side of man; as, on the other hand, she was not formed from his head, that she might understand that it was not hers to command but to obey her husband...” (Part II, Ch. VIII *On the Sacraments in General*, Q. XXVI *The Chief Duties of a Husband*)

“On the other hand, the duties of a wife are thus summed up by the Prince of the Apostles: ‘Let wives be subject to their husbands ... For after this manner the holy women who trusted in God adorned themselves, subjecting themselves to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord’ (1 Peter. 3:1 ff)... Let wives never forget that next to God they are to love their husbands, to esteem them above all others, yielding to them in all things not inconsistent with Christian piety, a willing and ready obedience.” (Q. XXVII *What the Duty of a Wife requires*)

³¹ Council of Trent, Session iv, April 8, 1546; D. 785.

This sense is to be found also in the works of—

St John Chrysostom (*Homily 20, On Ephesians 5:22-33*);

St Augustine (*De Moribus Ecclesiae 1, Ch.30, n.63*); and,

St Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae I, Q.93, Art.4, ad 1*);

and in the encyclicals, or addresses, of—

Pope Leo XIII (*Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae—On Christian Marriage [10.2.1880] nn.11, 16; Diuturnum Illud—On the Origin of Civil Power [29.6.1881] n.11;*

Immortale Dei—On the Christian Constitution of States [1.11.1885] nn. 19, 20);

Pope Benedict XV (*Natalis trecentesimali—to the Superior General of the Ursulines [27.12.1917]*);

Pope Pius XI (*Casti Connubii—On Christian Marriage [31.12.1930] nn. 4, 26, 27, 74 to 77*); and of

Pope Pius XII (*Address to Married Couples, 10 September, 1941; Address to Women of Catholic Action, 21 October, 1945*).

The Council of Trent said that no one should dare to interpret Sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which is held by Holy Mother Church.³² Leo XIII added to this when he said that an interpretation of Sacred Scripture is to be rejected “as senseless and false which [would make] inspired authors in some manner quarrel amongst themselves.”³³ But the interpretation posed by Pope John Paul II in *Mulieris Dignitatem* would make St Paul’s teaching in *Ephesians 5* quarrel with his teaching in his letters—

1 Corinthians 11:3—*The head to which a wife is united is her husband, just as the head to which every man is united is Christ;*

Colossians 3:18—*Wives must be submissive to their husbands as the service of the Lord demands;*

1 Timothy 2:12—*a woman shall have no leave from me to teach or to issue commands to her husband; and in*

Titus 2:4, 5—the younger women must learn... how to be... submissive to their own husbands.

It would make it quarrel also with the teaching of St Peter in 1 Peter 3:1 and in 1 Peter 3:6 referred to by the Council of Trent in the passage quoted above.

We do not say that Pope John Paul’s teaching is discordant with the Church’s constant teaching, only that *it appears to be so*. It is for theologians to address the question whether that teaching can be reconciled with the Church’s teaching.³⁴

³² Session iv, April 8, 1546; D.786

³³ *Providentissimus Deus*, D.1943

³⁴ Fr Brian Harrison, for instance, deals with the issue as an objection to his exposition of the Church’s teaching on the formation of Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam in his *Did Woman Evolve From The Beasts?* Cf. his articles at <http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt97.html> and <http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt98.html>. He argues that it would be unwarranted to conclude that the Pope was necessarily implying a negation of the traditional doctrine. He was not addressing the historicity of the accounts in *Genesis* of how the first human bodies were formed. Moreover, it could not be argued that he intended to require the assent of the faithful to the exegetical observations expressed in those comments as if this were in itself a teaching of faith or morals.

In any event, his teachings added to the dilemma for priests, bishops and fathers of families who wished to exercise the authority given them by God. Not only had they to face the facts that dissenters within the Church would not be corrected or punished and that their own endeavours to exercise their God given authority would not be supported by their bishop, but any argument they might put at an intellectual level to ground their rightful claims to authority was undermined by the Pope's public support for this contrary position.

Conclusion

It must be assumed that, at all times, each of the Popes referred to has acted in what he regarded as the best interests of the Church. The criticisms that have been offered should not be taken as a reflection on the personal integrity of any one of them for we have dealt here with matters in the external, not the internal, forum and God alone is the Judge of the soul. Moreover, the First See is judged by no one.³⁵ Pope John XXIII is a Blessed of the Catholic Church, and Pope John Paul II is about to be proclaimed a Blessed. *But, it is possible for a saint to err.* Were it otherwise, every saint would be a doctor of the Church, and the Church has bestowed the honour of *Doctor Ecclesiae* on very few saints—thirty three only.

Yet we insist that each of these Popes has played a part in the abdication of the Church's authority, an authority which must be restored if the Church is to exercise to the full her sanctifying role in the world.

The solution lies in the resumption by Pope Benedict XVI, or his successors, of the full powers of the office given them by Christ to be Father of all the faithful and to exercise those powers with vigour. The Pope must visit with the sanctions at his command—suspension, removal, interdict, excommunication—those theologians, bishops, priests and lay people who persist in denying the Church's teaching or in proclaiming as true some departure from that teaching. He must, moreover, expose systematically the evils of Feminism for what they are, and prudently, but firmly, move to extirpate them from the Church—from top to bottom.

Michael Baker

24th April 2011—*Easter Sunday*

³⁵ *Prima sedes a nemine iudicatur*; Decree of Gratian (1140 AD). Cf. *Code of Canon Law* c. 1404. 'Neither by Augustus, nor by all the clergy, nor by religious, nor by the people will the judge be judged... The first seat will be judged by no one.' Epistle by Pope Nicholas I to Michael the Emperor, 865, quoting words attributed to St Sylvester, and to the apocryphal synod of Sinuessa 303. [cf. Denzinger n. 330];