

## GNOSTICISM OF THE *CATHOLICA AUSTRALIA* PETITION

Heretics all, whoever you be,  
In Tarbes or Nimes, or over the sea,  
You never shall have good words from me.  
*Caritas non conturbat me.*<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Church is not something of man, but of God. And precisely because it is of God, it is infallible. “He who hears you,” Our Lord said, “hears me.” A comment of St Joan of Arc is to the point: “I cannot see any difference between Christ and his Church.” For practical purposes, the Church is Christ; Christ is the Church.

The Church has spoken on the subject whether women can ever aspire to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. It has spoken infallibly. How do we know? In *Pastor Aeternus*, document of the First Vatican Council, the Church confirmed that the infallibility of God’s Holy Church extended to Christ’s Vicar in certain circumstances. The Council Fathers said this:

“[I]t is a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*—i.e., when exercising his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians, he defines, by his supreme apostolic authority, a doctrine of faith or morals which must be held by the universal Church—he enjoys, through divine assistance, that infallibility promised to him in blessed Peter and with which the divine Redeemer wanted his Church to be endowed in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals...”<sup>2</sup>

“Hence,” the declaration went on, “such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves and not from the consent of the Church.”

The document laid down four conditions to be observed:

- 1) *office*—the Pope must purport to speak as supreme head of the Church;
- 2) *mode*—he must define a doctrine, not merely be expounding, commenting, observing, exhorting or discussing;
- 3) *content*—the doctrine must concern faith or morals; and,
- 4) *recipient*—his teaching must be addressed to all the Church, not merely a part.

The Pope must pronounce conclusively, enunciating as final and definitive to the exclusion of alternatives, eliminating doubt. He is not bound to any special formula. He does not have to attach an anathema. He does not have to say that he is speaking infallibly.

### **Ordinatio Sacerdotalis**

On the Solemnity of Pentecost, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1994, in an Apostolic Letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Pope John Paul II, having set forth shortly the history of the controversy which had arisen in recent times on the possibility of the ordination of women to the priesthood, made the following pronouncement:

“[I]n order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church’s divine constitution itself, in virtue of my

---

<sup>1</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *Collected Verse*, Penguin, 1958, p. 121

<sup>2</sup> *Pastor Aeternus*, 18 July 1870; DS 3074-5; D 1839-40; and cf. *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine*, Archbishop Michael Sheehan, revised edition by Fr Peter Joseph, London, 2001, pp. 193 et seq.

ministry of confirming the brethren I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgement is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful."

The Pope's teaching was addressed to the whole Church. It concerned faith. He purported to speak as supreme head of the Church. He defined a doctrine. He eliminated doubt on the question, pronouncing conclusively, enunciating finally and definitively, excluding all alternatives.

If there were any doubt that the late Pope's pronouncement was not infallible, one would have thought this removed by the ruling, "*Affirmative*", issued on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1995 by the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* to the *Dubium* (formal question) "Whether the teaching in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was to be understood as belonging to the deposit of faith?"

There remain, however, some who are still not satisfied. Nor will they ever be. Heretics always know better than the Church. Their superior knowledge is their essential characteristic. The Church has a name for the attitude they adopt—*Gnosticism*.

### **The *Catholica Australia* Petition**

The organisation, *Catholica Australia*, has prepared a petition addressed to the Plenary Meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference this month. It expresses a number of laudable concerns over the lamentable state of the Catholic faith in Australia without however ascribing true causes to the problems it mentions. The petition is ambivalent in its reference to "new forms of ministry and leadership", denigrating the office of the priesthood at the expense of these novelties and devaluing that office by pressing the view that vows of chastity should not stand in the way of ordination. It is preoccupied with the increased involvement of women in the Church's liturgy. Critically, the petition denies the force of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* by inviting the bishops to—

"[e]ncourage a wide-ranging discussion of the role of women in ministry and in the authority structures of the Church, including the question of women's ordination."

At the heart of this venture is a misunderstanding on the part of its promoters and subscribers about the nature of the Catholic Church. Implicitly it expresses the view that the Church is a human rather than a divine institution, something like the Anglican Church, whose problems can be solved *humano modo* by majority vote. Consistent with this attitude is the view that the majestic office of the priesthood has no intrinsic worth that the bishops cannot gainsay; that the priesthood was not instituted by Almighty God; and, that the ruling of Pope John Paul on the absence of authority in the Church to confer the priesthood on women may be disregarded at will.

### **Restoration of Catholicism in Australia**

The lamentable state of the Catholic faith in Australia can be addressed, and addressed effectively, if the right course is followed. It matters not in the least that the number of priests in this country be limited, provided they are diligent in the

duties of their priesthood and promote among the young men under their influence the majesty of the priestly calling.

Essential to the success of this course is the suppression of the permission of *chierichetti* and women altar servers on the altars of the Church in Australia. This permission coupled with the destruction through bureaucratisation and secularisation of the Catholic education system has been a disaster for the Church. Only one in 100 boys at a Catholic school retains his Catholic faith; none of these is interested in serving Mass where the priest provides no effective example of his priestly fatherhood by securing for boys such as him the exclusive right to serve Mass. *Exempla trahunt*. If the priest denies his priesthood by effete conduct in this important matter, why should the boy exert himself?

Let one event stand as a demonstration of the discrepancy between the celebration of the faith as it should be practised, and the way organisations such as *Catholica Australia* would like it practised.

On Sunday last, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2007 at 11.00 am, the Bishop of Sandhurst, Bishop Joseph Grech, processed into Sacred Heart Cathedral in Bendigo, Victoria, a church capable of holding more than 800 people, behind an assemblage of some 30 altar servers splendidly arrayed in red which included a number of women, preparatory to offering Mass. There were not 80 people in the congregation.

At 3.00 pm on the same day in the same church, Bishop Grech presided over solemn High Mass in the Tridentine rite celebrated by Bishop Peter Elliott, Auxilliary Bishop of Melbourne, in honour of Christ the King. There were six priests on the altar and more in the congregation which numbered in excess of 500. Some 280 of those present, a number of seminarians among them, had walked in pilgrimage most of the way from St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat, over the previous three days. Three priests had accompanied them, ministering unstintingly to their needs, hearing their confessions, giving them spiritual counsel and offering Mass each day. A choir of more than 50 filled the Cathedral with the sound of Gregorian chant and the polyphonic works of Palestrina. The Mass lasted some two hours and not one of the congregation left the church before it concluded.

The return to rigour in practice of the Catholic faith exemplified by those who conducted the *Christus Rex* Pilgrimage is the way to the restoration of Catholicism in Australia. Whilever Australia's bishops give credence to semi-heretical views about the Church advanced by organisations such as *Catholica Australia* the Catholic faith will languish here.

Michael Baker  
5<sup>th</sup> November 2007