

# Jesuits' statement obliges all of us

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

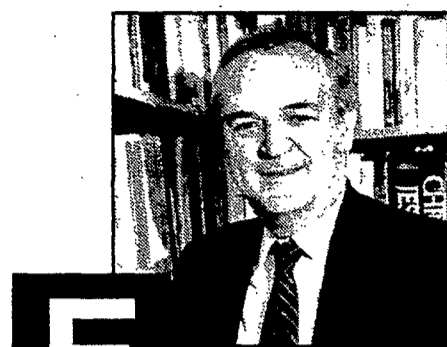
The recently concluded 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus might possibly be best remembered for its statement, "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society."

It begins with an explanation of why the congregation even addressed this issue. Among the reasons are that Jesuits are "more aware than previously that it is indeed a central concern of any contemporary mission which seeks to integrate faith and justice," and that it is a matter of "personal concern to those who work with us in our mission, especially lay and religious women."

Thereupon, the congregation describes the situation of women with uncommon bluntness. Women suffer discrimination, for example, in the pursuit of educational opportunities, in bearing the burdens of family life, in wages and salary, and in career advancement, and "too frequently" are subject to "outright violence." In some societies that includes dowry deaths and the murder of unwanted infant girls.

The statement also acknowledges the frustration that many women experience when, upon drawing attention to such discrimination, they are confronted by a "defensive reaction from men."

Citing the teaching of Genesis that women and men alike are created in the image of God (1:27), and Jesus's



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own open and supportive relationships with women, the congregation takes up the challenge and responsibility of "doing what we can as men and as a male religious order."

But the statement is careful not to presume to speak for women. Jesuits, it says, can speak only "out of what we have learned from women about ourselves and our relationship with them."

Given the urgency of the situation, however, the congregation could not avoid the issue. "We are conscious," the statement declares, "of the damage to the People of God brought about by the alienation of women in some cultures who no longer feel at home in the Church, and who are not able with integrity to transmit Catholic values to their families, friends and col-

leagues."

Significantly, the Jesuits do not pretend to be without fault themselves. They "first ask God for the grace of conversion." They acknowledge themselves to have been part of "a civil and ecclesial tradition that has offended against women. And, like many men, we have a tendency to convince ourselves that there is no problem."

"However unwittingly," the statement continues, "we have often been complicit in a form of clericalism which has reinforced male domination with an ostensibly divine sanction. By making this declaration we wish to react personally and collectively, and do what we can to change this regrettable situation."

The congregation pays tribute to those women who have directly ministered to and enriched the Society of Jesus through retreats, spiritual direction, and theological education, and expresses the hope that this "mutuality in ministry might continue and flourish."

Given the extraordinary diversity of cultures and socio-economic situations, it is impossible to lay down a prescription that would be universally applicable. But what all Jesuits, wherever they are, can do first is "to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women" (emphasis in text). Indeed, there is "no substitute for such listening."

"Listening, in a spirit of partnership and equality, is the most practical response we can make, and is the foundation for our mutual partner-

ship to reform unjust structures." Without listening, the real concerns of women are by-passed, "male condescension" is confirmed, and "male dominance" is reinforced.

Second, Jesuits can align themselves in solidarity with women in a variety of ways that are adaptable from culture to culture: for example, explicit teaching of the essential equality of women and men in Jesuit schools and universities; support for women's liberation movements; specific attention to the phenomenon of violence against women; facilitating the presence of women in Jesuit ministries and institutions, including the ministry of formation; and the use of inclusive language in speech and official documents.

"Above all," the statement concludes, "we want to commit the Society in a more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission ... We know that a reflective and sustained commitment to bring about this respectful reconciliation can flow only from our God of love and justice who reconciles all and promises a world in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

What the Jesuits have said in this statement applies not only to the Society of Jesus but to the whole Catholic Church. With just a change of a few references to Jesuits here and there, this statement belongs to all of us. And obliges all of us.

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<b>SUNDAY</b>		
2:00 p.m.	Holy Rosary Church	420 Lexington Ave., Rochester 716-458-4422
2:00 p.m.	St. Margaret Mary Church	400 Rogers Parkway, Rochester 716-342-2100
6:15 p.m.	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester 716-544-9951
7:30 p.m.	Holy Family Church	899 Jay St., Rochester 716-328-3110
7:30 p.m.	St. Boniface Church	15 Whalin St., Rochester 716-271-1468
7:30 p.m.	St. Rita School	1008 Maple Dr., Webster 716-671-1100
7:30 p.m.	St. Theodore Church	170 Spencerport Rd., Rochester 716-429-6811
<b>MONDAY</b>		
7:30 p.m.	St. Mary Lyceum Hall	15 Clark St., Auburn 315-252-9545
7:30 p.m.	St. Michael	401 S. Main St., Newark 315-331-2297
7:45 p.m.	St. Charles Borromeo Church	3003 Dewey Ave., Rochester 716-663-3230
<b>TUESDAY</b>		
7:30 p.m.	Holy Apostles Church	6 Austin St., Rochester 716-254-7170
7:30 p.m.	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester 716-544-9951
7:45 p.m.	St. Helens School	150 Lettington Drive, Rochester 716-235-1210
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>		
7:30 p.m.	Guardian Angels Church	2061 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester 716-334-1412
7:30 p.m.	Holy Family Home School Assoc.	899 Jay St., Rochester 716-328-4800
7:30 p.m.	Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church/St. Andrew School,	923 Portland, Rochester 716-226-6458
8:00 p.m.	Aquinas Institute	1127 Dewey Ave., Rochester 716-254-2020
<b>THURSDAY</b>		
7:30 p.m.	St. Anne Church	1600 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester 716-271-3260
7:30 p.m.	St. Michael Church	869 Clinton Ave. N., Rochester 716-325-4040
7:30 p.m.	St. Stanislaus Church	1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester 716-544-9951
8:00 p.m.	Holy Cross Church	4488 Lake St., Rochester 716-225-8363
<b>FRIDAY</b>		
8:00 p.m.	St. Mark Church	54 Kuhn Rd., Rochester 716-225-3710
<b>SATURDAY</b>		
1:00 p.m.	St. Michael Church	320 S. Main St., Newark 315-331-2297
7:30 p.m.	Good Shepherd Church	3288 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester 716-334-3518
8:00 p.m.	St. Thomas the Apostle Church	41 Colebrook Dr., Rochester 716-226-2943

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