

OPINIONS

Declaration improper argument from silence

To the editors:

I write to express my profound sadness and dismay over the declaration against the ordination of women by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. As explained in the *Catholic Courier* of Nov. 23, the declaration came as a response to a *Dubium* (doubt) about the Apostolic Letter written by Pope John Paul II on May 30, 1994. The matter was discussed at an ordinary session of the doctrinal congregation.

My sadness and dismay run to both the content of the clarification and the way in which it was addressed. With regard to content, I briefly draw the reader's attention to the church's long-standing hesitancy to build anything on an argument from silence because such an argument is too full of ambiguities. The tradition, it is argued, is silent on the question of the ordination of women. Therefore, the church does not have the authority to confer priestly ordination on women. The question of women's presbyteral ordination was never seriously raised and so the obvious question is, why not? Such a probe into the history of the faith community

might invite us to examine our long-standing prejudices and the forces at work from the very beginning of the Christian movement which subverted the new vision of humankind which the messages of Jesus inaugurated. Thus in raising the argument from silence as its main objection to the ordination of women, the apostolic letter of May 1994 itself breaks with the church's normal mode of positive argumentation. Consequently the letter involves the church in a host of ambiguities and misrepresentations such as one sees in the explanations given by Father Gus DiNoia (*Catholic Courier*, Nov. 30: "Doctrinal expert explains Vatican reasons"), for example, the false antithesis between science and faith, confusion in the use of name "Jesus" and the title "Christ" and to speak of "Christ ordaining" is to read back into earlier texts later institutional developments. Caution in creating precedent may be urged on the basis of an argument from silence, but surely not a doctrine to be held infallibly!

I also object to the way in which this declaration was arrived at. Infallibility is a very precious gift given to the en-

tire Church as hearer of God's word. The charism celebrates a consensus of the local churches with the local church of Rome which has primacy in the communion of the local Catholic Christian churches. There can be no declaration of infallibility without consensus whether that declaration is built on an *ex cathedra* pronouncement with all the necessary conditions obtaining or is the result of the ordinary and universal magisterium of the church. ... Where there is no positive, clearly uncoerced consultation in faith, there is no consensus and where there is no consensus there is no pledge of freedom from error in the handling of the faith. In place of this consensus, are we to understand that an apostolic letter can be turned into a *quasi ex cathedra* statement in hindsight? And this by a response to a doubt raised by whom we do not know? Even the charism of infallibility invested in the Pope as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful demands consultation. Why else would the Pope be designated as head of the college of bishops and said to confirm his brethren in the faith? There was wide consultation of the lo-

cal churches before the joyous declaration in 1854 of the Immaculate Conception and in 1950 of Mary's Assumption. ... Obviously all this is known to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Why then this break from tradition and the declaration of infallibility in the form of a response to a *Dubium*? Is this statement a preemptive strike to close off discussion? And is that the purpose of the charism of infallibility? Or are we to understand this declaration to be a proposal which is then to be discussed by the local churches, perhaps in synods with a further discernment in a universal synod of bishops from around the world? If such is the intent, then let's get on with it. If such is not the intent, then where is the consensus of the faithful, where is the consultation of bishops? The Congregation's response has raised more questions than it solved, and some get to the deepest issues of being church at all.

Father David P. Reid, SSCC
Ss. Peter & Paul/St. Francis of Assisi Churches, Rochester

EDITORS' NOTE: This letter has been edited to comply with space limitations.

Women are core of church, yet not equal

To the editors:

I like to respond to your article on "infallibly." Pondering on the issue of women in the priesthood made me look at my own parish community and wonder if all the women in our parish decided not to participate in all the committees as well as all the activities, the parish would be nonexistent.

In our church we hold Mary in such high esteem and worship second to none to Jesus Christ.

But in her son's own church, if she were alive today and wanted to preach or do priestly duties, she would not be allowed to. Also at one time in our church she wouldn't have been able to enter the altar area unless she was cleaning it.

How can we be whole, if we still practice exclusivism. Example: An apple without its core is not an apple, like the womb



it carried the seed. The women are the core of the church, so let them bring the seed of life back into the church, and let us grow and prosper. Let's stop limiting ourselves and give opportunity to all. If it weren't for my wife leading me, I'd have been lost a long time ago.

I have been proud and happy to have the opportunity to instruct junior/senior high children of our parish (in) religious education. I have found the girls sometimes wonder what has the church to offer me, to feel an equal participant of the church.

The world has set many obstacles and hoops to jump through; why is the church insisting on acting the same and not looking on a spiritual level (at) which there is no barrier.

Frank DiFilippo
Smith Street, Rochester

Did theologian mean to imply excommunication is dissenters' due?

To the editors:

Writing as someone who continues to advocate and promote the ordination of women to the priesthood, I seek clarification regarding the sacramental status of dissenters from the most recent major pronouncement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Are they automatically excommunicated? In your issue of Nov. 23, you cite a declaration by a Roman theologian, Father Fisichella, to the effect that "No dissent is allowed" and noncompliance with the Vatican's position would bring one "outside the communion of the Catholic Church." Presumably this means that one who otherwise is a Catholic in good standing is excluded from receiving Communion — though not from attending Mass. If you could publish some authoritative interpretations and/or rulings about this — including, if possible, one by Bishop Clark — I would greatly appreciate it. I've no doubt that there are many other persons who would also welcome the clarification(s).

Chalmers MacCormick
Aurora

EDITORS' NOTE: To our knowledge, no church officials have formally expanded on Father Fisichella's statement.

Order from pontiff justified by Gospel, 'intention of Christ'

To the editors:

The recent infallible order by Pope John Paul II that denies women the right to become priests is justified.

Before Christ's death, He celebrated the Last Supper exclusively with men, who were to become the first priests.

It was never Christ's intention for women to become priests.

Dianna Richmond Ives
Simpson Road
Rochester

Yes, it would be sad if 'daughters' moved on

To the editors:

In the November 30th issue of the *Catholic Courier* Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSI, president of St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester stated that her deepest concern over the exclusion of women from the priesthood was, "how will we pass on the Catholic Faith to our daughters and future generations of woman in a way that will make ours a credible church to belong to?"

I ask, how would we consider ours a credible church to belong to if it accepted false doctrine opposed to God's revealed truths, such as the ordination of woman to the priesthood or other such liberal/modernist notions?

The Roman Catholic Church is the only credible church on earth, has been for two thousand years, and will always be, because it is the only church established by Jesus Christ Himself. Sister Schoelles also felt that, "many women will find reason to move on, and that would be sad." It would indeed be sad; where would

these women go? Would they leave the one true Church founded by the Son of God to join one of the over 80,000 different "Christian" sects (churches) that exist in the world today, all of which were founded by mere humans to foster their own erroneous convictions?

In paragraph 846 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the following is quoted from Lumen Gentium: "... they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it." Yes it would be very sad if they moved on.

From a motive of charity toward the Sister Schoelles, I would like to quote, two passages from "The Imitation of Christ," which after the Bible has been the all-time favorite book of Catholics throughout the world for more than 500 years ...

"If God were always the only object of our desire we would not so easily be disturbed at the resistance of our options. But often something lies hid within, or oc-

curs without, which draws us along with it. Many secretly seek themselves in what they do, and are not sensible of it. They seem also to continue in good peace when things are done according to their will and judgement; but if it fall out contrary to their desires they are soon moved and become sad. Difference of thoughts and opinions is too frequently the source of dissensions amongst friends and neighbors, amongst religious and devout persons" (Book 1, Chapter 14).

"It may also happen that each one's thought may be good; but to refuse to yield to others when reason or a just cause requires it, is a sign of pride." (Book 1, Chapter 9).

I sincerely desire the happiness of all who call themselves Catholic, but the only way to true happiness is to honor God and submit to his will as revealed to the magisterium of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Robert A. Martino Sr.
West Church Street, Elmira

A notice to readers

In an effort to incorporate in a single edition all publishable letters regarding the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's recent pronouncement on women and priesthood, we allocated these two Opinions pages to the topic. We be-

lieve these letters present most of the arguments that could be made in favor of or in opposition to the CDF ruling.

As a result, we do not plan to publish any subsequent letters on this subject.