

DIOCESAN NEWS

Pastor: responsum is not infallible

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger mistakenly proclaimed as infallible the church's teaching that it had no authority to ordain women, according to Father Joseph A. Hart, associate professor of systematic theology at St. Bernard's Institute.

Father Hart, also pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Brighton, outlined his contention in the parish's Dec. 17 bulletin.

The priest also presented his ideas at a workshop Jan. 25 at St. Bernard's Institute. That workshop explored the teaching authority of the church.

In his "From the Pastor" column in the parish bulletin, Father Hart noted that on Nov. 18, Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect, or head, of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "stated his official opinion that the teaching that priestly ordination was reserved to men alone was already infallible."

Furthermore, the cardinal stated this "not because the Pope had declared it so in a solemn act of teaching, but because the dispersed bishops had already done so by teaching it definitively in their dioceses," Father Hart wrote.

"This was a communication to the bishops from Cardinal Ratzinger and not the Pope," Father Hart added. "While the Pope allowed it to be communicated to the world, it does not automatically become the Pope's opinion because, by the

Church's own legal rules, it would have to say that this was 'communicated in a special manner' and hence bearing the Pope's authority. There was no such language."

Father Hart then outlined the three manners in which a church teaching is proclaimed infallible: "by a pope himself teaching *ex cathedra*, that is as pastor and teacher of all the faithful defining matters of faith and morals; by all the bishops gathered in ecumenical council solemnly defining a matter of faith and morals; (or) by all the bishops in their dioceses teaching as one that a particular doctrine of faith and morals is to be held definitively by all."

"It is this last use of infallibility that is the hardest to pin down," Father Hart continued. He added that there are three ways the church has recognized that something has been infallibly taught by the bishops:

- By consulting with all the bishops about what they teach definitively in their particular churches.

- By the constant and universal consensus of Catholic theologians that a particular teaching has been and is taught everywhere definitively.

- By the body of the faithful's wholehearted adherence to this teaching.

Father Hart noted that the church's canon law states no doctrine can be understood to be infallibly defined unless it is clearly established as such.

"As well-meaning and sincere as Cardinal Ratzinger's efforts are to keep unity in the Church over this doctrine, he did not tell us how he could assert that this teaching has been and is taught by the universal magisterium of the dispersed bishops when clearly none of the three usual conditions was met," Father Hart wrote. "Consequently, abiding by the law of the Church, I think that we are forced to conclude that (Cardinal Ratzinger) is mistaken, and that the bishops have not proclaimed this doctrine infallibly."

The *Catholic Courier* asked for responses to Father Hart's conclusion from both the Diocese of Rochester and from Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, apostolic pro-nuncio to the United States.

The diocese declined to comment on Father Hart's arguments, according to Elizabeth Brown, director of the diocese's communications office.

"Father Hart speaks for Father Hart," she said.

The apostolic pro-nuncio did not contact the *Courier* with any response by the time the *Courier* went to press Feb. 27.

Father Hart's discussion of the responsum appears at a time many Catholic commentators throughout the nation also are examining it.

The Jan. 26 *Commonweal* contained eight articles related to the responsum, some critical and others supportive of the responsum and the women's ordination movement.

In an article critical of women's ordination advocates, Michael Novak, a long-time commentator on church issues, said that the male figure of Jesus could become "problematic" in a church that ordains "priestesses."

"The Catholic church ... is fleshy and incarnational in its fundamental doctrines," Novak wrote. "The complementarity of the genders, and the differences between them are crucial to its self-understanding."

America's Dec. 9 edition contained reviews of the responsum by Father Ladislav Orsy, SJ, a visiting professor at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C., and Father Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, a retired professor of ecclesiology and an author of works on the church's teaching authority.

Both articles concluded that the CDF left too many questions unanswered when it issued the responsum, and therefore, left it open to the argument that it was not part of the church's infallibly taught deposit of faith.

Petition calls for retraction

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Between 1,000 and 2,000 diocesan Catholics have reportedly signed a letter to the nation's bishops asking them to call on the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to withdraw its Nov. 18 responsum stating the church has no authority to ordain women to the priesthood.

The responsum also declares that this precept belongs to the infallibly taught deposit of faith.

The letter is to be sent to the bishops after March 15, according to Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, pastoral associate at St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Place.

In addition, the responsum prompted a series of workshops throughout the diocese in January and February to examine the teaching authority of the church. Copies of the letter to the bishops were available at the Jan. 25 workshop at St. Bernard's Institute.

The letter uses three arguments to buttress its request:

- The responsum departed from church tradition in not following the church's usual manners of declaring a teaching infallible.

- The CDF did not consult the church's bishops, and hence ignored the church's principle of episcopal collegiality.

- The responsum has created a difficult pastoral situation, for Catholics who support women's ordination, and for those who are concerned about the future of the church's sacramental life given its priest shortage.

The letter even uses quotes from Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on the need for responsible dissent in the church to support its call for withdrawal of the responsum.

"If our letter is viewed as dissent, it is in the spirit of Pope John Paul II's own encouraging word in his book, *The Acting Person* that 'dissent is important to the community,'" the petition reads.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

ON HER WAY — Sister Theresa Rutty, RSM, sings with her mother, Ann Smith, at her Celebration of Sending at the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse Chapel Feb. 24. The ceremony included a homily by Sister Theresa's brother, Father James Ruddick; a calling forth by Sister Ann Miller, Sisters of Mercy president; and a solemn blessing by Father Robert Bradler. Sister Rutty plans to work with the Mercy community in Chile for the next three years.

Notre Dame Retreat priest to speak at Cayuga parishes

WEEDSPORT — The Northern Cayuga Cluster will sponsor a family mission March 3-7, featuring Father Joseph Freund, a Redemptorist priest from Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua. The theme is "Sharing Divine Life: God's Communal Plan for Our Salvation."

Services will be at 7:30 p.m. March 3 through March 7 at St. Joseph's Church, Weedsport; and at noon March 4 through

March 7 at St. John's Church, Port Byron.

Parishioners are encouraged to attend the opening session and both noon and evening sessions. Children are welcome. The cluster includes St. Patrick's Church, Cato. More information is available from Eileen Cichello at 315/834-9725.

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