

Disturbing statements against Diocesan Church

By Louise Melanson and Ellen Bennett

Diocesan co-ordinators for Adult Faith Education

Published Friday August 17th, 2007

Appeared on page D7 (Times&Transcript, Moncton, NB)

While wanting to respect a diversity of opinions, we wish however to clarify certain statements and rectify several inaccuracies found in articles published recently in different local newspapers.

One of these articles, "Disobedience: a new sacred cause," vehemently criticized the Moncton Diocesan Church. Some of the authors seem to be acting as spokespersons for a group of people belonging to what appears to be a local ultra-conservative wing claiming to be "protectors" of the Pope (Catholics United to Peter), all the while moving away from the local Bishop.

Yet, we know that Archbishop André Richard is in union with the Pope and all the Canadian Bishops. However, to obey only one level of authority while not respecting the other can create an ambiguous situation. It raises the question as to why one chooses to obey an authority from abroad rather than one legitimately established in one's own milieu? This question surfaces especially in view of the fact that after consulting with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) in Ottawa, nobody there was able to identify the official existence of the organization "Catholics United to Peter."

Canon Law and the teaching of the Church have for centuries entrusted the Diocesan Bishop, in union with the Holy Father, with full pastoral authority in his diocese. Refer to the Dogmatic Constitution "Lumen Gentium" of Vatican II Council, 27: The pastoral office or the habitual and daily care of their sheep is entrusted to them (bishops) completely. See also Canon Law 381, 391-2.

The allegations against the establishment of a Church-Communion stem from an obvious misunderstanding of Catholic theology. They seem to suggest that Vatican II does not mention Church-Communion. On the contrary, the following few quotations taken among numerous others found in documents from Rome and Vatican II, as well as from writings of well-known theologians recognized by the Church, such as Jean Rigal, Congar, etc., are proof thereof. In "Lumen Gentium," see articles 4-5-6-7, and in the Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles Laici" of Pope John Paul II, chapter II, article 21: The participation of the Lay Faithful in the life of Church as Communion . . . The mystery of the Church-Communion, and chapter IV, 32 By divine institution Holy Church is structured and governed with a wonderful diversity, etc.

Who could logically be against the participation of the baptized in Christ in some form of community of faith and charity? Is this not what all bishops and Catholics of good-faith wish? Moreover, Church-Communion inspired by the Holy Spirit, is an integral part of the hierarchical Church. There is no opposition here but rather an integration of the two

realities serving the Mission. Both are necessary and vital to the Mission. In this Church-Communion, the faithful owe respect and obedience to both levels of authority.

The School of Faith was founded in 1988 as a means of offering theological formation to lay persons selected by their parish to hold leadership roles in the community. Its purpose is to help prepare future lay pastoral ministers to better serve their parishes. With a better understanding of Christian Faith and the teachings of the Church, they can exercise more grounded, knowledgeable, and effective pastoral work. The Church has evolved and we must too. We must read the signs of the time as Vatican II invites us to do. Presently, we are fortunate to be able to rely on countless numbers of lay persons who are involved in parishes, and who are doing wonderful, irreplaceable work for the Church, many of whom have received formation through the School of Faith and other diocesan initiatives. The School's professors are carefully chosen to teach the Evangelical values and official teachings of the Church as stated in the Catholic Catechism particularly with reference to pastoral work. And we respect freedom of thought in discussion of current Church issues.

To act differently would be a lack of professional responsibility and an abdication to an adult and informed conscience.

This committee was founded by Archbishop Donat Chiasson in 1986. Its members never demand the ordination of women, as one of the authors suggests. They know the present teaching of Rome on the subject and they comply. The purpose of this committee is to promote education on the evolution and importance of the role women exercise in the Church, as well as to shed light on their highly valued contribution to its vitality. Can we imagine today's Church without the contribution of women? The answer is too obvious.

This does not, however, take away our right and responsibility to think and to reflect on the subject as Pope Benedict XVI invited us to do in an interview in Bavaria on Aug. 16, 2006: "Women must, and we along with them, search for their proper place."

There are no small base-communities endorsed by this diocese. We do, however, have small prayer groups which seem to be contested by some of these authors. We feel blessed to have such groups who meet to pray and we give thanks to the Lord for them! These people meet to break open the Word and to pray for one another and for all of us. This is a current practice in many dioceses and one that helps to deepen spiritual life and by extension, strengthens parish faith life. We hope they will continue.

How such small prayer groups, where priests do participate, could succeed in bringing about the downfall of an Institutional Church that has existed for over 2000 years, is beyond all comprehension.

These recent publications, some taking on such a provocative and confrontational tone (i.e.: suggesting to the faithful to withhold future financial donations to the diocese) seem to question their professional objectivity. Are we dealing here with some kind of public demonstration of personal power? What a sad faux pas if such were the case.

We believe Christ calls us to a totally different attitude, and that He invites us to build the

Body of Christ in a Church-Communion: I beg you . . . to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love . . . making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4, 1-3).

It is in this spirit that we want to reassure the readers who may have been troubled or questioning after reading these articles.

We are thousands of people who work in collaboration with the priests and the archbishop of the diocese, each in his or her own way, often as volunteers in response to their baptismal call. We are fully united to our archbishop, André Richard, whom we recognize as our loyal and legitimate pastor named by the Holy Father to lead our Diocesan Church. We believe in our Church. We love her and wish her to be the image of her leader, Christ: humble, loving, righteous and communal.

And, yes, we hope that our Church will always promote freedom of conscience, of thought, and of speech, in a spirit of truth and love. There is room for all of this in Christ's Church. He will always lead His Church and we fully trust in Him. He wants us all free and loving like Himself.

In this lies the spirit of the law!

 Louise Melanson is the Diocesan co-ordinator for Adult Faith Education (French), and Ellen Bennett, Diocesan co-ordinator for Adult Faith Education (English) in the Archdiocese of Moncton. They write in collaboration with a group of Diocesan faithful from all corners of the diocese: members of Adult Faith Education, members of the Women in the Church Committee, numerous members of the School of Faith, and many pastoral workers involved in the diocese.