

Wolves in sheep's clothing

The letter titled “Disturbing statements against Diocesan Church”, published in this newspaper on August 17, 2007, was an attempt to calm Catholics who may have been troubled and questioning by the revelations contained in the series “Disobedience, a sacred cause”, published earlier by Catholics United to Peter.

The authors of the letter, Mss. Louise Melanson and Ellen Bennett, co-coordinators of Adult Faith Education for the diocese, label our association, “a local ultra-conservative wing”, which supposedly places us in the same party as Cardinal Ouellet, Primate of Canada and archbishop of Quebec City who has been called the “the spokesperson of the *“the most reactionary (ultra) conservative fringe of Canadian Catholicism”* by members of the Canadian wing of the international dissident organization “We are Church”. If all Catholics, faithful to the Pope (and bishops in communion with him) and to Church Magisterium, are ultra-conservatives in the eyes of the authors, where does their own faithfulness rest? The authors also call into question the legitimacy of our association by stating that nobody at the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (CCCB) office in Ottawa was able to identify the official existence of Catholics United to Peter. The authors ought to be aware that the Church recognizes the right of association to its members and no private association is required to seek official recognition by Church authorities. These are called “de facto associations” according to the *Guidelines for the CCCB and Associations of the Faithful* (Recognition of National Catholic Associations). This begs the question: is the group, *Femmes en Église* (Women in the Church), which is also a lay association, officially recognized by the CCCB?

The authors assert that members of this committee (*Femmes en Église*) never demand(ed) the ordination of women. Interestingly, the talk given by Sr. Viola Doiron¹ at the conference held in the basement of the cathedral on March 11, 2006 was exactly on this issue. As evidenced by the following extract, her message involved much more than the ordination of women: (translation) “The official non-recognition of women by the Church hierarchy in the exercise of services offered has contributed to raising the question of the equality of women and men in the Church – which, in turn, has led to the “ordained ministry”. This has prompted world-renowned feminist theologians to develop a common outlook: they demand the ordination of women on the basis of equality. They warn, however, against integrating the hierarchy without changing the Church, without removing discrimination, domination and exclusion. They insist on the importance of fully developing our baptismal priesthood by developing various feminist ministries in order that an egalitarian Church, freed of clericalism (but not of its clergy) may come about and that the People of God be rehabilitated in its life and its governance.” Sr. Doiron carries on: “This situation has also brought about the creation of Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW), which held its 2nd international ecumenical conference in Ottawa in June [2005].” (WOW is listed as a dissident organization on the web site of the Oakland, California diocese). “It gives us great joy, adds Sr. Doiron, to notice that the feminist outlook is very active in the **ecumenical church**.” (She is certainly not referring here to the Roman Catholic Church!). “How can the Church continue to defend equality between men and women in society while it maintains, in its own organization, practices that exclude women from certain offices (i.e. the priesthood)? Yes, let’s keep up our courage and let us continue to introduce a feminine vision in our Church.”

She then expounds on the feminist agenda in the Church: “The task at hand is to use each of the organizations to which we belong to develop a theology of the Church (Communion Church) that will eventually attain a critical mass (of Catholics, presumably). [Religious] communities could recommend women of experience, women theologians or catechists, women, bearers of the Word, to sit, amongst other things, on committees of the Bishops’ conferences. At the grassroots level, do not abandon, but continue to hold public discussions, study sessions, sponsor publications, write books, and organize groups of people. [...] We must contact bishops in our respective dioceses. Many bishops are open to such collaboration. However, as they are bound by Canon Law and their fidelity to Rome, many

withdraw from this debate. We must be bold, encourage our bishops to open the door to a feminine presence in their midst, for the good of the Church.”

It is obvious from these comments that the role of the *Femmes en Église* committee goes far beyond “promoting education on the evolution and importance of the role women exercise in the Church” or “discussing current Church issues”, as claimed by Mss. Melanson and Bennett. These comments, warmly applauded by the participants, and qualified as “prophetic” by the chair of this committee leave no doubt as to this committee’s true role: promoting the feminist agenda in the Church, including the ordination of women. Since this event was filmed, we challenge Mrs. Melanson, who is responsible for this committee, to make the video public, so that people can judge for themselves what is the real agenda of this committee.

It is worth mentioning that Sr. Doiron is professor at the School of Faith, as well as Ms. Sophie Tremblay, a full-fledged member of the Canadian wing of “We are Church”, making the claim that “the School’s professors are carefully chosen to teach official teachings of the Church as stated in the Catholic Catechism” sound hollow.

The authors allege to our misunderstanding of Catholic theology insofar as the Communion Church is concerned, using references from *Christifidelis Laici* and *Lumen Gentium*. Let us be clear: our association recognizes the Church as a mystery of communion as defined in the papal document, *Christifidelis Laici*. However, the current Pope, at the time he was Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said that 1- the term “communion” did not occupy a central place in the [2nd Vatican] Council.” and 2- its “meaning was distorted and rendered superficial (by theologians). One could not help but notice an increasing emphasis on the horizontal dimension, the omission of the idea of God. “Communion” ecclesiology began to be reduced to the theme of the relationship between the local Church and the Church as a whole. And that, in turn, declined into the question of the assignment of competent authority as between the one and the other. The theme of egalitarianism also took a large place, and according to that, there could only be perfect equality in “communion”. (Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: *The Church as Communion*, Ignatius Press, p. 132). This reminds us of the definition of Communion Church taught at the School of Faith: “*The communion is a manifestation where everyone is equal...*” confirming that this definition derives from dissident theology.

Recognizing the Church as a “mystery of communion” and inventing a new Church model, which happens to be called Communion-Church, are two separate realities. This reform involves much more than temporary arrangements until the number of priestly vocations increase. It involves major structural and doctrinal reforms initiated locally with the approval of the local bishop (this phenomenon is incidentally not exclusive to Moncton). It must be pointed out that in the 2000 years of Church history, all approved reforms have always come from the top. Those that were initiated from the local level have always resulted in schism, the Protestant Reform being the best example of this.

The authors also state there are no small-base communities in the diocese. This is true...for now. They insist, however, on the existence of small prayer groups, which we do not contest as they allege. In fact, we encourage the multiplication of prayer groups or cenacles in our diocese, with particular emphasis on praying the Rosary and consecrating oneself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Church, which is going through a real Passion, would greatly benefit from these prayer groups.

What Mss. Melanson and Bennett fail to say, is that the small-base communities are part of the Communion Church reform, the small prayer groups they refer to being foreseen as a first step to the creation of these base communities. Otherwise, why did the diocese hold a training session on the diocesan level on this subject in 2004 and why would some parishes held information sessions on them?

Catholics United to Peter does not oppose small-base communities whose members would be faithful to Church Magisterium. They would be a blessing for the Church. The problem is that the small-faith community conceived by dissidents serves primarily to change the Church by publicly criticizing the Pope and bishops in communion with him. The interest shown by the Canadian wing of *We are Church* towards their creation and knowing how many of these in some European countries do exactly that is certainly cause for alarm.

Finally, the authors claim that we have set ourselves up as the “protectors” of the Pope all the while moving away from the local Bishop. Let us state the facts. As a sign of respect towards the authority of the local bishop, we have provided him with factual information on what we consider to be troubling developments in our diocesan Church and, in the spirit of dialogue, offered to meet with him to discuss it. He categorically refused to take into consideration the information provided saying we were not a “canonically” recognized association. Many other lay Catholics, who have written to the Archbishop regarding legitimate concerns over the years, have also been turned away. He has been utterly silent on many important issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem-cell research, etc., with the result that many Catholics ignore the position of the Church on these critical issues. The diocesan Pastoral coordinator, in his report on last Fall’s diocesan consultation, recommended less emphasis on teaching doctrine, while the diocesan bookstore disseminates heretical teachings, a lot of it feminist theology. The diocese embarks on a major reform without any formal announcement by the bishop. In actual fact, this task was either delegated or taken on by Ms. Melanson, who announced in the most recent diocesan bulletin, that several recommendations in the above mentioned report were in the course of implementation, without specifying what they were. And on top of that, we learn from Sr. Doiron previously quoted, that many bishops have withdrawn from this (feminist) debate because they are bound by Canon Law and their fidelity to Rome. Where does that leave our bishop? And where is he in this most public controversy, which lays bare the divisions within the diocesan Church? Given his silence, inaction and lack of transparency, we found it important to alert the faithful.

While it is sad to admit, it appears that Archbishop Richard has abdicated his responsibilities to “sanctify, teach and govern”, according to the norms of the Church, in communion – not half-heartedly – but in full communion of heart, with the successor of Peter. Faced with such a situation, how can one claim that we are moving away from the local bishop. Is it not the other way around?

We conclude by quoting from Messages of Our Lady to priests: “I welcome into my Immaculate Heart my Church (North America), which is going through hours of agony and of painful crucifixion here, because of the loss of the true faith on the part of many, of an ever deeper division, and of an obstinate opposition to the Pope. This is concretized in the ignoring of his Magisterium and even in the spreading of doctrine opposed to it and openly contrary to Catholic faith. The cause of this grave situation is the pastors. Bishops of the holy Church of God, return along the road pointed out by the Good Shepherd, be faithful to the Gospel and guard, with strength and courage, the deposit of the faith which has been entrusted to you. Bishops of the holy Church of God, return to a full, humble and total unity with the Pope, because today you are running the danger of a most grave schism, and because of this how great is your responsibility before God! » (May 17, 1987)

Please pray for our bishop and for our priests!

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¹ full text of presentation by Sr. Doiron is available in French at :www.catholicunitedtopeter.com