

## **The Feminist Threat to the Church Part VI** **by Patricia Phillips**

In my last article chronicling the baleful effects of dissenting feminism on the Church (published in *Christian Order* June/July 2005), I asked readers to write to Bishop Vincent Malone, as he is responsible for allowing the dissenting feminist group *Catholic Women's Network* (CWN) to be listed in the official Catholic Directory, and ask how his conscience could allow this, when it's as plain as a pikestaff that CWN doesn't accept Catholic teaching on a variety of issues. I would like to thank those who wrote to Bishop Malone, and for forwarding his replies either to myself, or the editor of *Christian Order*. As expected, Bishop Malone steadfastly refuses to believe the incontrovertible evidence that has so often been put before him – either that, or he believes it but just won't do anything about it, for reasons known to himself. His replies were very interesting, and to me at least, indicate the “*diabolical disorientation*” that Sister Lucia of Fatima predicted would sweep through all levels of the Church. It is a sad day when one has to face up to the fact that a bishop prefers to put the interests of dissidents before defence of the Faith. Here is one of his airy dismissals:-

*“Thank you for your letter concerning the Catholic Women's Network. You will have noticed that their entry in the Catholic Directory declares themselves as “acknowledging and accepting the authentic teaching of the Church”. In addition I have received their assurance only last month that they have not published any article questioning the Church's stance on abortion, nor attacked the Church's stance with respect to homosexuality, and that their aims do not include the ordination of women. Thank you for your vigilance.”*

A dissection of Bishop Malone's reply into three parts will reveal his *utter lack* of vigilance. **Firstly, the matter of the promotion of abortion.** CWN claims it hasn't “*published any article questioning the Church's stance on abortion*”, but why does it promote the journal of the pro-abortion group *Catholics for a Free Choice* (CFFC) in *each and every* edition of its own journal, *Network*? Bishop Malone attempted to counter this question in a reply sent to a different person, by quoting CWN, who had written to him stating:- “*We receive journals from other organisations and a short factual account of their main items is included in our 'News and Resources' section in the interests of making available to our members the opinions of other members of the Church.*” That would be fine, but CFFC are *not* part of the Catholic Church – never have been, never will be. This group has been denounced by the U.S. Bishops Conference, which has stated that CFFC is not Catholic. Also, *Catholic News Agency* recently published the following news about CFFC:-

*“The Vatican Secretary of State has asked the bishops' conferences of Latin America to be on the alert against a campaign by 'Catholics for a Free Choice' (CFFC) to gather signatures of religious leaders in an attempt to support the concept of 'reproductive health' - a euphemism for*

*abortion - at the upcoming United Nations summit. From September 14-16 the Millennium +5 Summit will be held in New York, during which heads of state will discuss the proposals and goals set at the Millennium Summit of 2000. CFFC is taking advantage of the opportunity to gather as many signatures as possible for a statement that endorses the concept of 'reproductive health' according to the documents issued after the Cairo population summit and the Beijing summit on Women. At these two summits, 'reproductive health' meant abortion as a family planning method, and for this reason the Holy See and delegations from many other countries strongly rejected the concept. Responding to the Holy See's request, the Bishops' Conference of Brazil put out its own statement calling on bishops around the world to be vigilant against attempts to coax them into falling into the trap of signing the document and discrediting the action of the Church and the Holy See in defense of life."*

As one can see from this, there can be absolutely no *legitimate* reason why Catholics would want to promote the work of this anti-Catholic group. And yet Bishop Malone appears to swallow CWN's excuse for promoting it in each and every issue of their journal. I wonder what he would do if one of the parishes in his diocese printed an update of news from the journal of the *British National Party* in each of its bulletins? Would he think it acceptable for the parish to promote a racist group "*in the interests of making available the opinions of others*"? Of course not. The joke of it is that CFFC has been bank-rolled by such groups as the *Playboy Foundation*<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps CWN ought to ponder this fact next time they're tempted to harp on about the "degradation of women", or "patriarchal oppression".

**Secondly, I refer to the matter of the promotion of homosexuality in *Network*.** Bishop Malone quoted CWN as stating it has never "*attacked the Church's stance with respect to homosexuality*". Why then does it promote the work of the dissenting group *Roman Catholic Caucus of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement* in each and every issue of *Network*? After years of protests, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor has now asked this group to stop using the title Roman Catholic, and to desist from organising Masses in his diocese, due to its dissent from Catholic teaching. CWN also published a two-page article in the February 2005 issue of *Network* by *Caucus* member Celia Gardiner, in which she was completely dismissive of Church teaching on homosexuality, boldly proclaiming that gay Catholics are "*totally confident that it is perfectly compatible with the Christian faith to be gay and to form same sex relationships*". Does that sound like defence of Catholic teaching? As I have mentioned in a previous article, CWN were among the groups that co-hosted a London reception in honour of the Vatican-banned nun who dissents from Church teaching on homosexuality, Sr Jeannine Gramick. If Bishop Malone thinks that all this doesn't constitute an attack on the Church's teaching on homosexuality, then I would dread to think what he does consider to be an attack.

**Thirdly, I refer to Bishop Malone's quote that CWN's aims "do not include the ordination of women."** The following declaration from the Autumn 2001 issue of *Network* puts paid to this lie:-

*"Women's Ordination Worldwide,  
International Conference,  
Dublin, June 2001.*

*From: Catholic Women's Network*

*Catholic Women's Network believes that the gospel speaks about freedom from oppression and calls women to full participation in all aspects of life and the church as a matter of justice. We strongly endorse the aims of the world-wide movement for the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church, and of the recent conference in Dublin, for a renewal of priesthood within transformed and inclusive structures, where women's gifts are welcomed and accepted. We believe that it is totally wrong to attempt to ban serious debate, reflection and research of this issue. We commend the vision of those who initiated the conference and are grateful that it has re-energised us all to work more vigorously for the above aims.*

*Catholic Women's Network."*

Bishop Malone needs to stop taking CWN's word for it, and actually *read* their output – and lest he think that some of the above quotes are in the past, and that CWN might have mended its ways, I give the following quote from the editorial on page 3 of the May 2005 issue of *Network*, which speaks of the anxiety caused to the CWN and others by the election of Pope Benedict XVI, and asks:- *"How will the man who has been the 'enforcer', who has restricted discussion about women's ordination, supported John Paul's ban on condoms in any circumstances, and been strident in opposing homosexuality, respond to debate on these and other issues? Are we due for a new, darker age within the Catholic Church?"* So the CWN worries that the Church might be "darker" because it can't countenance women's ordination, condoms or the practice of homosexuality. *Quod erat demonstrandum.* Bishop Malone, please take note.

Now on to the *National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW)*, which is controlled by known CWN members and supporters. Page 3 of the Spring 2005 edition of the NBCW newspaper, *Catholic Omnibus*, gives details of the Joint Dialogue Group Conference (between the Bishops and the NBCW). The report is titled *"2020 Vision – The Challenge of Change"*. President of the NBCW and CWN supporter Dr Mary McHugh, gave a presentation on managing change in the National Health Service, which, according to the report drew *"many valuable parallels on the challenge of change in hierarchical management and decision-making procedures"* – in other words trying to use secular business methods in order to impose the feminist agenda on the divinely constituted Church of Christ. I noted that out of all the priests that the NBCW could have invited to speak at this conference, it chose a notorious dissenting retired priest, namely Fr Derek Reeve of the Portsmouth Diocese. In an article he wrote for the website of the dissenting

group *Catholics for a Changing Church*, titled “*Belatedly Appreciated*” he states:- “*I have enjoyed being a priest and I continue to enjoy it but I look forward to a time when the priesthood as we have known it will be no more and when we will be able to select from among our numbers those whom we want to serve us, women and men, and ask the bishop to lay hands on them to be our presiders at the eucharist, our preachers, our carers or whatever.*” One should not be surprised, as this sort of thing ties in very much with the NBCW agenda. On pages 6 and 7 of the Spring 2005 *Catholic Omnibus*, there is a report on the 5<sup>th</sup> Open Conference of the NBCW, which was titled “*Who decides now?*”. Catherine Pepinster, editor of the dissenting journal *The Tablet*, was invited to speak on this occasion. I was struck by two things from this report, under the heading “Main Points Emerging”. One of them was the call for inclusive language, the second was the following points raised:- “***Is celibacy necessary for the ordained ministry – neither gender nor marriage should prevent ordination; Mary Magdalene was apostle to the apostles; Do deacons affect lay involvement; why not women deacons . . .***”. And these are “Main Points” for discussion and action from a consultative body to the Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales! Apparently, the full report of this conference will eventually be published on the NBCW website ([www.nbcw.org](http://www.nbcw.org) )

On page 2 of the Summer 2005 issue of the NBCW’s *Catholic Omnibus* is an article titled “*An emerging awakening of lay vocation*” by Anne Cross, who describes the formation and purpose of the group *Network for Lay Ministry*. I have referred to this group in previous articles. Nicky Stevens, who is now listed in the *Portsmouth Diocesan Directory* as the Head of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis, and Colette Joyce, who is a listed CWN member and who also believes that she has a vocation to be a Catholic priest, have both been involved in it. One thing that this NBCW article *didn’t* mention is that Anne Cross is an active member of the *Catholic Women’s Ordination* group. She, and listed CWN members such as Alison Gelder and June Boyce-Tilman, recently ran workshops and panels at the second *Women’s Ordination Worldwide* conference at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, held on the 22nd - 24th July 2005. This conference was discussed on the forum section of the *Catholic Women’s Ordination* website ([www.catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk](http://www.catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk)) Here are a selection of e-mails posted on this site, which reveal how these women are working to further their agenda. The first is from a Pat Brown:-

*“I was at the ordinations on the St Laurence River. It was a very moving occasion and I couldn’t help but admire the women who were brave enough to take this step. I wouldn’t want to stop any woman taking this course of action if she feels it is right. I think it would be great if the women bishops were to ordain a man who had been refused ordination by the official Church (although we would need to know that he was refused for reasons we would consider invalid!) However, this does not fulfil the political aspect of our campaign which is what I’m most interested in. Women are suffering, particularly in the developing world, because of the misogyny of our Church’s hierarchy. This is what I feel*

*needs to be addressed. This is why I feel we have to continue to campaign from within the Church. I hope our movement is able to continue to contain the different types of action happening within it."*

To which Anne Cross replied:-

*"I agree Pat, campaigning from within the church is so important. I think the leadership of WOW over the next 4 years is vital to the strength of the campaign - which should be about so much more than the organising of the next conference, important as that is. It will be a real challenge to hold together all the different views that are emerging within the movement; to engage catholics in the pews in the discussion and to somehow begin dialogue with the church hierarchy. For me there was a tension at the conference about the relevance of the hierarchy - on the one hand we dont recognise their authority as they are misogynist - on the other they are the structure within which we want to operate! The upshot of this tension is that WOW is struggling to engage with it and so avoids it. Clearly the keynote speakers were advocating communities of liberation outside the structures.....which suits the hierarchy very well!*

*I dont think we should be afraid of saying: we dont have a blueprint of a new model of priesthood but we as women want to be in on the discussions NOW! We need to have people on every diocesan council prepared to challenge the male only decision making process. Every cardinal should be nervous that every time he steps out of his door he will have to answer questions about the relevance of a male only priesthood ..... to do this we need more people on the ground willing to get involved in a strategic way – this has to be done at a parish level. I was struck by the S. African bishop saying at the conference that people in S.Africa have more important things to think about than women's ordination - like AIDS. I appreciate her point but think more should be made of the link between oppression of women and AIDS and poverty and other abuses. – maybe campaign literature should pick up on this more. The most memorable image of the conference for me was at the final liturgy, to see the loaves being held aloft by a group of women and to then have it handed out to all 500+ of us. so many gifts to share - so much to celebrate!"*

In another e-mail Anne writes:-

*"I am sorry I cant make the CWO AGM due to a family commitment as I think it is the opportunity for much discussion following the WOW conference. It seems to be that CWO has 3 main functions: Support, Education & Campaigning. Support happens in local groups, liturgies and between friends made through CWO. Education has been addressed by the Leeds group through the course and also through the newsletter - there is certainly more discussion needed over any follow up*

*now the Leeds course has finished and whether there should be any link with the courses run in other countries.*

*The strategic campaigning dimension of the women's ordination movement should be being drawn up at a worldwide level through WOW. There seems to be much nervousness about this, at present WOW is only really working on the conference and leaving the rest to national groups. I believe this is a wasted opportunity - we are a worldwide church whose local leaders have no power. We have to make our case in Rome! Our case includes women who have out of frustration & a sense of urgent calling gone ahead for ordination. It includes women who have been ministering for years as priests without ordination, it includes women who don't believe in ordination at all - our worldwide church includes these diverse ways, we are never going to get a consensus what we need is honest discussion. I hope the AGM will discuss these things honestly and openly not to moan about the past but to discern a way forward."*

In the same edition of the NBCW's *Catholic Omnibus* as Anne Cross's article, is an obituary for Sister Kira Sooldhost. Sister Kira was a listed CWN member and a supporter of women's ordination. The obituary states:- "*. . . she hoped and prayed that the subject of women priests would be discussed and resolved*". Sister will now be aware that it has already been resolved. May she rest in peace.

Also at the Women's Ordination Conference in Canada was listed CWN member Sister Myra Poole. The following report about her contribution to the conference came from the *Catholic World News* website ([www.cwnews.com](http://www.cwnews.com))

*"Myra Poole, an English sister of the Notre Dame Community, and a long-term, out-spoken member of the Catholic Women's Ordination of Great Britain, also took part in the discussion. She began by asking if a male saviour can save women. She then went on to explain how she reinforces independence and liberation in women in the institutions where she works by encouraging contraception. She told the bishop, "I am doing it because you don't." She was emphatic that she would not leave her congregation because that's just what this Papacy wants. She said that she did not believe religious life would remain the way it is: "We must be the hair-shirt, thorn in the side, and voice of conscience of the Church hierarchy, with a modern interpretation of our vows." She questioned the notion of women seeking ordination in this Church where their ministry, if accepted, would be controlled by a male hierarchy."*

Shortly after the election of Pope Benedict XVI, Verena Wright of the NBCW, and also a listed CWN member, made it onto *BBC Newsnight*. Bishop Crispian Hollis of Portsmouth was also in this news feature and *Christian Order* has already reported on his terrible performance (see *Christian Order* editorial, Aug/Sept 2005). The furore over Bishop Hollis may have caused people to overlook the

significance of what was said during the section featuring Ms Wright. Below are selections from a transcript of a video of the programme:-

*“We report on the hopes and fears of Britain’s grassroots Catholics following the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI. Now there’s a new Pope but some old problems. Pope Benedict, who said Mass at the Sistine Chapel, today paid tribute to Pope John Paul II and promised to work hard for understanding with other churches. But one of the Pope’s biggest problems lies in the rich world, where many Catholics routinely ignore Church teaching on sexual matters like contraception, and where Church attendance is far from healthy. **Tim Whewell now reports from the Diocese of Portsmouth where some faithful British Catholics are seeking more independence from Rome . . . .”***

*“. . . . But there are also Catholics who think the Church isn’t fitting them into its calculations. Verena Wright helped build the community in Paulsgrove, but as a woman and a divorcee, she sometimes feels cold shouldered by Catholic doctrine. **She is part of a network of women that wants a Church where authority doesn’t always come from above.***

**(At this point, a title comes up on the television screen, saying “Verena Wright – National Board of Catholic Women” – and Verena states:-)** *“I would like to see the new pope listening, listening in an active sense with the expectation that there are things to learn, and if the Pope can do that and work with his fellow bishops in such a way that there is a sharing of ideas, a sharing of leadership, that would begin to be a model for the Church as a whole. Vatican II gave all people the sense that in Baptism they become priests and therefore we all have a priestly ministry to follow.”*

With bishops like Vincent Malone and Crispian Hollis it is little wonder that the dissenting elements within the NBCW are beginning to throw caution to the wind. I believe the problem has become so bad that mere exposure and protest will not suffice, important though they are. Above all else we need to pray, and I cannot think of any better solution to this problem - and to many other problems in the Church and in the world today - than to practice with fervour the First Five Saturday devotion as given by Our Blessed Lady at Fatima. While the feminists are expending diabolic amounts of energy multiplying their committees and conferences, let us resolve to storm Heaven by making a special effort on the First Saturday of each month to receive Holy Communion, go to Confession (this can be done within the octave if Confession is not available), pray five decades of the Rosary and also meditate for 15 minutes on the mysteries of the Rosary. If we do all this with the intention of making reparation to Our Blessed Lady’s Immaculate Heart, She will not fail us.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on CFFC and how it is funded, read the excellent book “Catholics for a Free Choice Exposed” by Brian Clowes, PhD. Published by Human Life International.