

The Feminist Threat to the Church

Part IX

by Patricia Phillips

In my last instalment on radical feminism in the Church in England and Wales [CO, Nov. 2007] , I reported that the dissenting feminist group Catholic Women's Network (CWN), which has recently changed its name to Women Word Spirit (WWS), was continuing with the procedure to be listed as an approved Catholic society in the National Catholic Directory. Up until now, it was doing so with the connivance of the panel which decides who gets listed. As you may recall, CWN/WWS failed to get an entry in the 2007 edition of the Catholic Directory due to an administrative slip-up on its part. I can now report that CWN/WWS is again not listed in the 2008 Catholic Directory. After years of complaints from Catholics objecting to this dissident group being listed in the Catholic Directory, it has now been confirmed that it is no longer being included. On page 12 of the Autumn issue of its journal *Network*, the CWN Contact Secretary, Mary Warrener, states:- "*Despite lengthy correspondence showing the continuity between CWN and WWS we have not been included in the national directory (in response to complaints about our supposed views on abortion and links with gay/lesbian groups). A paragraph will appear in (at least) four of the Diocesan Directories - Brentwood, Cardiff, East Anglia and Westminster, listed as CWN but referring to WWS, and the wording as on the introductory leaflet. Please let us know of entries in other Directories.*" Other dissident feminist groups, connected to CWN/WWS, such as Network for Lay Ministry and St Joan's International Alliance are still listed in the Directory. Please, would readers living in the abovementioned dioceses write to their bishop, giving him evidence of CWN/WWS's dissent, and asking him why it is listed in his diocesan directory as a Catholic organisation. Three detailed examples giving absolute proof of CWN/WWS's dissent can be found in my November 2007 article (also online at www.catholic-feminism.co.uk/pat8.pdf). Briefly, these are:

- Its published support of abortion/contraception
- Its published support of women's ordination
- Its published support and promotion of other dissenting groups, including the pro-abortion/euthanasia and contraception group which calls itself "Catholics for a Free Choice".

Apostasy

The June, September and December 2007 issues of *Network* clearly show the continuing dissent of CWN/WWS. Some of its key members quite openly admit they are no longer in communion with the Catholic Church.

Veronica Seddon of CWN/WWS's CORE group and also on the Editorial Board of *Network* says on page 18 of the June 2007 issue of *Network*:

"I finally left the church [sic] around 1990. This was a very difficult decision for me; my husband and all my children had already walked away but my parents gave me a heritage of conformity. Nevertheless, I could no longer tolerate the church's attitude to women priests and inclusive language, nor its stance on the use of condoms to prevent HIV. For reasons of personal integrity I had to leave. Now I find my religious solace in women's groups and in women's liturgy."

The September 2007 issue of *Network* carries the Annual Report for 2006-2007 (p. 11). It confirms that CWN/WWS remains a member of the National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW), an official advisory body to the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, as well as retaining membership of the European Network – Church on the Move and other dissenting groups such as Catholics for a Changing Church, Catholic Women's Ordination, We Are Church and St Joan's Alliance. It also mentions that it reports (though never critically) on the activities of such dissenting groups as Roman Catholic Caucus of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, the pro-abortion/euthanasia/contraception Catholics for a Free Choice and Women's Ordination Worldwide. Information about the activities of these dissenting groups is continuously promoted in *Network*.

Blasphemy

The December 2007 *Network* is all about "The Three Marys" – "Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Mary of Bethany." As one can imagine, it is awash with error and blasphemous pseudo-intellectual clap-trap concerning the subjects. Take these examples from a piece by Mairin Valdez about her attitude to Our Blessed Lady, titled "Mary Then and Now":

"Marina Warner describes the cult of Mary as damaging for women, an anti-intellectual retreat on 'glutinous religious simplicities'. Other feminists and social scientists have taken similar lines – the love of Mary being the product of unhappy life circumstances, low self-esteem, psychological and social alienation ... Much of what (Eamonn) Duffy refers to resonates with my own experience of Mary, as for many other *Network* readers, I guess. She was a bloodless, perfect, sinless, expressionless, demure, passive, insipid and white person, clothed in white and blue – obviously good and nice, but not someone I wanted to be my best friend ... Mary has come through differently in better theological understandings than those I grew up with. Once we get away from the idea that Jesus was born with infused knowledge and even in the womb knew the time and type of his death, then Mary comes through as his primary teacher through whom he discovers himself, bit by bit. Through feminist theology I realise that everything I got of Mary as a young person came filtered through the religious and cultural patriarchy which had colonised her. Motherhood too had to be reclaimed from these – Mary is part of birthing and creation in the cosmos. There is much feminist theological writing on Mary that I have still to access... "

If anyone needed a good dose of St Alphonsus de Liguori or St Louis de Montfort on the Mother of God, it is this woman. But then I presume she would dismiss them as “*too patriarchal*” – even though they enjoy the Beatific Vision. Tragic.

Revolution

The December 2007 *Network* also mentions (p. 29) that CWN/WWS would like its 2008 Annual Gather to slot in with the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology summer school, which was held at the University of Winchester from 21-24 July and featured arch-feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether, a long-time favourite of CWN/WWS, recently attacked Pope Benedict XVI over the Holy See’s condemnation of feminist-inspired ecclesiastical antics. The *Daily Telegraph* of 1 March 2008 reported:

"The Vatican has cracked down on feminist interpretations of the liturgy, ruling that God must always be recognised as Our Father. In a move designed to counter the spread of gender-neutral phrases, the Holy See said that anyone baptised using alternative terms, such as “Creator”, “Redeemer” and “Sanctifier” would have to be re-baptised using the traditional ceremony. The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith said yesterday: “These variations arise from so-called feminist theology and are an attempt to avoid using the words Father and Son, which are held to be chauvinistic.” Instead, it said that the traditional form of “Father, Son and Holy Ghost” had to be respected."

Ruether was quoted in the same piece as saying that among “liberal” Catholics, Benedict XVI “is not our Pope”. Once asked why she stayed in the Catholic Church when she views it as inherently sexist, she replied: “*I stay because the Church has the xerox machines and you need the xerox machines in order to win the revolution.*”^[1]

The excellent *Alliance of Dissent* states that Ruether was the keynote speaker at the inaugural CWN meeting, held in 1984 by members of the St Joan’s International Alliance at St Mary’s Teacher Training College in Twickenham.^[2]

Ruether’s call, encouraging dissidents to use the resources of the Church to spread their revolutionary agenda (and often to feather their own nests), has been heeded by many radical feminists. For every dissident feminist like Veronica Seddon who has “left the Church” - although most who say this continue to meddle in its affairs - there are many more who, while rejecting areas of Catholic doctrinal and moral

^[1]. *The Catholic Experience in America*, Joseph A. Varacalli, 2006.

^[2].

The Alliance of Dissent – Turning the Church Upside Down, Fr Michael Clifton, 1993. .

teaching, remain in the visible structures of the Church – sometimes in very influential positions.

Subversion

One example is Dr Tina Beattie. Readers may be interested to check out her website, especially her CV at <http://tina.beattie.googlepages.com> for full details of her past and continuing involvement in ecclesiastical structures. Beattie was always listed as a CWN member, but isn't in the 2006 CWN/WWS directory. This doesn't mean that she has left, since members can opt to be omitted from the directory. However, whether in CWN/WWS or not, her dissent from Catholic teaching is on public record and beyond dispute, as reported in my previous articles on feminism.

Beattie is a Director of *The Tablet* and has used this dissident organ to expound her dubious views on abortion (www.thetablet.co.uk/articles/1510) compounded by another *Tablet* article titled "Life in all its reality" (27 October 2007), justifying her decision to continue supporting Amnesty International in spite of its policy change on abortion. She has publicly upbraided the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for its censure of dissident theologian Fr Jon Sobrino, and has openly given her support to the campaign for women's ordination.

She also spoke at a conference run by the dissenting homosexual group *Quest* in 2005. A report from *Quest's* website states: "Dr Tina Beattie joined us for dinner on Saturday evening and showed serious collaboration on the dance floor later. On Sunday morning, unruffled by the previous evening's exertions, she presented us with a thorough analysis of the theology of ministry ..." She was asked to speak again at *Quest's* 2008 conference in Roehampton. The publicity stated: "Dr Tina Beattie will be making a welcome return following her impressive talk at the 2005 conference in Liverpool. She will also be on home soil as she is Reader in Theology and Religious Studies at Roehampton University."

Despite her open dissent - or perhaps because of it - Beattie regularly speaks on Catholic premises, and was invited to speak at the NBCW 2008 Nottingham conference titled "Magnificat, Magnificat – the Challenge for Women Today". Remember, *NBCW is an official advisory body to the Bishops' Conference*. That the NBCW should give Beattie a platform should come as no surprise as this outfit is still dominated by known CWN/WWS members and other dissenting feminists. NBCW also published one of Beattie's articles on the front page of the Winter 2008 edition of their newspaper *Catholic Omnibus* (distributed in most churches), titled "The Dignity of Women – a missed opportunity?", which criticised aspects of John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, and took a sideswipe at the conference being held in Rome in February 2008, to mark the 20th anniversary of the Letter. In it she stated:

What does it mean, for example, to say in *Mulieris Dignitatem* that "In the name of liberation from male 'domination', women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine 'originality'. There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not 'reach fulfilment', but instead will deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness". Where is this 'well-founded fear'? Does any woman reading this really know the meaning of "feminine

‘originality’ and our ‘essential richness’? These are concepts redolent of romantic fantasies of womanhood which have little bearing on the everyday realities of women’s lives, yet the session titles for the *Mulieris Dignitatem* conference suggest an agenda heavily tilted towards perpetuating rather than challenging or debating these anachronistic stereotypes...

In case you are wondering about the session titles that so disturbed Beattie’s dissident sensibilities, they were:

- “Reflection on women since the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*; evaluation and prospects”
- “Jesus of Nazareth, Mary and women in the Gospel and in the early Church.
- “Christianity and the advancement of women”
- “So God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gn 1, 27)
- “Woman and man, created each for the other”
- “Problems and Contemporary cultural trends”
- “Women’s responsibility and participation in building up the Church and in society”
- “The role and mission of women”
- “Predominant challenges as perceived in various parts of the world”

Beattie recently penned an article for the *Tablet* titled “Femininity within the Trinity” (29 March 2008) which, at a first brief glance, looked surprisingly like it might be supportive of the Vatican crackdown on feminist interpretations of the liturgy, but on closer inspection revealed itself as yet another call for the ordination of women:- “If the hierarchy wants to reinforce the message that Trinitarian language is about relationality rather than masculinity, then one way to do that would be to surrender any literal association between the physical masculinity of the priest and the eucharistic presence of Christ. This would be an eloquent way of affirming that the Trinitarian relationship transcends gender, and that God is neither he nor she. The presence of a woman performing the Eucharist or the baptismal rite would be a sacramental sign of the mystery of the Incarnation and of the redemption of our humanity which includes the totality of who we are ...”

In the same article, Beattie uses the terms “radical feminist” and “conservative” to describe others, which gives the impression of trying to represent herself as a mainstream Catholic, situated between two extremes. Do not be fooled. Recently, she applied for the Bede Chair of Catholic Theology at Durham University’s Centre for Catholic Studies. As part of the selection process for this post, she gave a presentation in which she spoke of the importance of recovering the wisdom of St Thomas Aquinas in today’s world! *Amen to that!* But while recommending the

Angelic Doctor, she is apparently unable or unwilling to utilise his heavenly wisdom to escape the pride and foolishness of her *non serviam* mindset.

The March 2008 issue of *Network* carries a glowing review of the book by dissident Australian bishop Geoffrey Robinson *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*. Bishop Robinson has since been condemned by his brother bishops as reported in the *Melbourne Age* of 14 May 2008 (www.theage.com.au): “Australia’s Catholic bishops have disowned retired Sydney bishop Geoffrey Robinson, accusing him of failing to understand fundamental church teachings. The country’s bishops have released a public statement suggesting that Bishop Robinson - as a bishop, a man chosen by the Pope to guard the teaching of Catholics — is wrong about the authority of Christ and the authority of the church to ‘teach the truth’.” In the same edition, *Network* also promotes booklets published by the dissident Catholics for a Changing Church and carries the usual pieces promoting the work of groups dissenting from Church teaching on homosexuality and women’s ordination.

Action

If further evidence were needed of the continued damage being inflicted by radical feminists and those clergy who dance to their tune, while writing this piece I received an e-mail which carried the following sad news: “*The Pontifical High Mass in the Traditional Latin Rite due to be offered in Cardiff Cathedral on Sunday 18 May at 11.00 am has been cancelled at the last moment. The Latin Mass Society withdrew its involvement with this Mass after the Cathedral Dean insisted that a lady server be present in the Sanctuary during Mass.*”

So, although CWN/WWS is not listed in the Catholic Directory at present, we cannot afford to drop our guard. Please help to begin the work that is needed to bring about the restoration of orthodoxy and Tradition. Write to your bishops and complain if CWN/WWS are listed in your diocesan directories. Write to the Cardinal and also to the General Secretary of the Bishops’ Conference^[3] asking why they allow the dissident CWN/WWS to be members of the NBCW - one of their own official advisory bodies - and ask what they have to say about the NBCW inviting a public dissident (Tina Beattie) as the keynote speaker for its 2008 Conference.

If you receive no replies or unsatisfactory replies, write to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. Remove copies of NBCW’s *Catholic Omnibus* if you find it in churches (this is a free newspaper). If you come across NBCW representatives at parish/diocesan meetings, ask them publicly if they fully and unequivocally accept Catholic moral and doctrinal teaching, and also ask them what they think about CWN/WWS being a constituent member of the Board. You have a

^[3].

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RIGHT to ask such questions, as they claim to be representing YOU. And last but certainly not least, pray. Pray the Rosary, and pray to Our Lady of Good Success, who foretold of the crisis of dissent in the Church in our times, in Her apparitions to Mother Mariana de Jesus Torres in the 17th century (CO, May 2008 and www.traditioninaction.org/OLGS/olgshome.htm).

Our Lady of Good Success, pray for us.
