

FEMINISM AND THE CATHOLIC FAITH

by

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THREE of my little grandchildren were sitting on the living-room floor one day last summer, talking about what they will do when they grow up. James, who is seven, said he wants to be a priest. Nine year old Rachel said she might be a nun. Richard, the three year old, said he's going to be a polar bear.

"Oh Richard, you can't be a polar bear!" James protested.

"I can too," said Richard. "I can be a polar bear if I want to, and that's what I'm going to be!"

What does their conversation have to do with Catholicism or with feminism? It touches on the essential lesson each one of us has to learn in life: that we are not rulers of the Universe. Babies rage when their whims do not meet instant agreement. But most of us soon see that the wind and the sea do not obey us; $4 + 4$ won't add up to 9; we can't grow up to be polar bears. Reality will not bend to our will: we must conform to reality. Believers come to see that God is the ultimate reality, and they must prefer His will to their own.

Some persons refuse to learn that lesson. Lucifer said, "I will not serve," and went to Hell. Adam and Eve tried to become "as gods" and brought death into the world. At the end of our lives, C. S. Lewis says, either we will say to God, "Thy will be done," or He will say to us, "Well, since you insist, thy will be done," and let us go to the Hell we have chosen.

The twentieth century has shown us what happens when

man defies God's Will and makes himself his own god. That very kind of defiance is being acted out in the Church today. Catholic feminists are rejecting reality, both as revealed in nature and as supernaturally revealed by God. Their rebellion is not a misguided search for truth about God, but a cry of "My will be done"; apparently concerned with this world to the exclusion of eternity, they make personal "empowerment" the focus of their passion. In the process they do incalculable damage to themselves and to the rest of the Church. Insisting that reality is infinitely malleable, they reject all natural roles, all patriarchy, all hierarchical authority -- including God's. When reality nevertheless proves unyielding, resentment moves them to attack the Church, as though her teaching had created reality rather than interpreted it. Thus they have come to hate the Church, the Pope, the Scriptures, Jesus the Redeemer and the God of Judaeo-Christian Revelation.

A revolution broader than feminism has infiltrated Church institutions in the past thirty years, devastating much of Catholic society. Religious communities are dying; empty convents and schools stand like ruins from a war; once crowded seminaries have been sold to sects and cult groups. But property is not the first business of the Church; her purpose is saving souls. Betrayed by those they trusted as their strongest defenders, hundreds of thousands of Catholics have lost their Faith, not only because of public scandals among clergy and religious, but because their religious education has been empty or poisoned. Dissenters have revived theological and moral errors about the Nature of God, the Person of Christ and the Church's Magisterial authority that were long ago condemned as heresies. Catholic feminists did not invent

those ideas, but they exploit them toward their own even more radical ends, explicitly calling their effort “political subversion.”¹ They are the shock troops of the revolution, deadliest enemies of Holy Mother Church.

In many countries they are also the most powerful lobby in the Church. They dominate her professional and bureaucratic corps all the way from the offices of national episcopal conferences through universities, diocesan offices, schools and retreat houses to local parishes. Though feminist leaders make little effort to hide their hatred, they continue to identify themselves, and to be identified, as “Catholics.”

For example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, the most vocal feminist spokesman and the movement’s leading organizer, discards such basic Catholic doctrines as the Incarnation and the immortality of the soul.² She has called the Church “demonic” and has said that women “must emancipate themselves from Jesus as Redeemer.”³ She teaches at a Protestant Seminary.⁴ Yet she is always described as a Catholic theologian.

Sister Sandra Schneiders, IHM, says in her recent book *Beyond Patching* that feminists see “more and more clearly that every aspect of (the Catholic Faith tradition) is not just tainted but perverted by the evil of patriarchy. It is not that the tradition has some problems,” she says, “The tradition is the problem.”⁵ Yet she still teaches Scripture at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California.

Ruth McDonough Fitzpatrick of Women’s Ordination Conference has declared in public, “We’re helping the patriarchal Church to die with dignity.” She figured

prominently in news reports about the American bishops' June 1992 meeting at the University of Notre Dame. She was cited as a spokesman for the network of rebel organizations that had commissioned a Gallup poll on "Catholic" attitudes in order to publicize it during the bishops' meeting. It purported to show that large majorities of lay Catholics agree with feminists' stands on all questions, though the fine print indicated that 60 per cent of all those polled, and nearly 80 per cent of the young adults were not, in fact, regularly practising Catholics. While the bishops met inside the university buildings, the rebels outside held court for the press. It was their statements that dominated the media reports which, as always, described Fitzpatrick as a "reform-minded Catholic."

Sr Madonna Kolbenschlag has described the Blessed Trinity to cheering Catholic feminists as "a good ole boy, associating intimately only with two other divine males," who has "legitimated religious bigotry, racism, classism, imperialism, clericalism, and all the other isms you can think of." She blamed "the Genesis myth" for the establishment of monotheism (which she opposes) and said "a woman has no choice but to be an atheist."⁶ At last report, Sister Madonna was still a member in good standing of the Order of the Humility of Mary.

Despite their blasphemous public statements, it is not feminist **leaders** who present the greatest danger to lay Catholics. Most of the damage to the Church in North America is done by feminist **followers** who, like the vast majority of all rebels in the present civil war in the Church, are Church employees. Father Richard McBrien, former

chairman of theology at the University of Notre Dame boasted to a 1991 “Future of American Church” conference that his “party of change” constitutes the vital “center” of the Church today and:

“...seems to embrace just about every active minister in the Church. It dominates the fields of liturgy, religious education, justice and peace offices, campus ministry, Catholic higher education, much popular spirituality, and the discipline of theology as a whole.”

Except in claiming to represent the “center,” he was correct.

Chicago Call to Action is a leading organization in the Catholic radical network in America. It was instrumental in soliciting funds and supporting signatures for a revolutionary full-page advertisement that appeared in the *New York Times* on Ash Wednesday, February 28, 1990, under the title “A Call for Reform in the Catholic Church.” It was also instrumental in commissioning last summer’s Gallup poll on lay “Catholic” attitudes. When president Mary Ann Savard described those present at CCTA’s 1991 conference as “the middle management of the church,” she was right, too.

As feminists publicly deny but privately deplore, few lay-women in the pews are feminists.⁷ But many members of the Church’s middle management no longer believe what Catholicism has taught for almost 2000 years about God, the human condition and the means of salvation. The revolutionary ranks include mid-level bureaucrats, dissenting theologians of both sexes, academics from Catholic

colleges, a contingent of ex-nuns, a scattering of embittered or disturbed lay women and certain secular opportunists like Frances Kissling, the director of the abortion lobby Catholics for a Free Choice. But few lay Catholics realize that nuns still associated with their communities make up most of the feminist constituency.

Of course, not every feminist nun holds every radical view. If you imagine the Catholic feminist movement as a staircase, there's someone standing on every step. In addition to knowing rebels, there are some who seem unable to discern what feminism implies, some who seem capable of holding contradictory beliefs in separate compartments of their minds, some who don't even know where the staircase leads, but are simply following the crowd. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the sole canonical association coordinating communication between American nuns and the hierarchy from the time of the Second Vatican Council until this year, has aggressively pursued a feminist agenda, yet most women religious in affiliated communities have never expressed objection to even the most radical voices. So it seems clear they are all headed in the same direction: **down**.

Yes, there are orders in excellent health. Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity are growing all over the world, and there are other vital communities, most of them small, many of them new, many of them contemplative. Just this past summer, their new Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious in the United States was granted canonical standing parallel to LCWR. It represents only about ten per cent of all U.S. women's communities but

because they are alive and growing, they represent the hope for the survival of religious life. And even in corrupt congregations there are still faithful nuns, often marginalized by their rebel sisters; no women in the Church have suffered more at the hands of feminists. But despite that remnant, it is largely nuns who fill the membership rolls of the feminist movement, nuns who put radical theory into practice at the local level. Most North American women's religious communities are corrupt. That is why they are dying; why the average age of nuns is 66; why, unless God sends new St. Teresas to reform them, major U.S. women's communities will cease to exist within 20 years.

Feminists confirm this troubling state of affairs in their own writings.⁸ In a March, 1992, article in *National Catholic Reporter*, feminist Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, admitted that the structures of religious life "have been bent to the breaking point." But she praised those who bent them, and blamed the decline of women's congregations on Catholics unwilling to embrace the "new role of religious life." The trouble with traditional nuns, she said, is that they are "addicted to the warmth of the nest," to "comfort, to security, to private spirituality alone, to the preservation of monastic museums" and "obsolete religious institutions."⁹

The truth, however, is that feminist nuns destroyed their own communities. The single most shocking book I read during my research for *Ungodly Rage* was not one about witchcraft or satanism. It was *Claiming Our Truth*, a volume of essays edited by Sister Nadine Foley, OP, prioress of a Dominican community in Adrian, Michigan, and a past president of LCWR. Published by LCWR, it consists of analyses of a 1986 LCWR member survey. In

answer to the question “Who is God?” the survey reported one response of “Trinitarian”, two of “incarnate in Jesus”, two of “Indwelling Spirit.” The overwhelming majority answered in one way or another that God is “the energy in the Universe.”¹⁰

Feminist theologians repudiate the Fatherhood of God and reject the doctrine that the male Jesus is our only Saviour. Some advocate the substitution of pagan goddesses; more propose a “goddess within,” an immanent process goddess who is ultimately the self. Feminists invert the moral order, listing pride as the first of virtues, and demanding that the Church join them in endorsing sexual permissiveness as a right and good. They scorn the Mass, contradictorily claiming both that gender should not matter to priesthood and that no male priest can represent them at the altar. They politicize worship with demands for altar girls and “non-sexist” liturgical language. They exalt imagination above reason as a source of “creative” theology and spirituality. They are also involved in every radical social and political movement in society, from Marxist states in the Third World through “reproductive freedom” at home. In 1984 and 1986, many of them publicly dissented from Catholic teaching on the immorality of abortion by signing their names to advertisements in the *New York Times* that were purchased by Catholics for a Free Choice. Some march with CFFC in pro-abortion demonstrations; some have filed *amicus curiae* briefs with CFFC in support of legal abortion. Many feminists are “gay rights” activists; of sixty “endorsing organizations” listed on the 1992 New Ways Ministry brochure,¹¹ forty-six are committees or communities of nuns. Most evangelize

for New Age practices; some claim to be witches; many dance in neo-pagan Wicca rituals, chanting "I am goddess." They call themselves WomenChurch.

Are these just a few extremist outsiders? Sadly, they are not. Sister Maureen McCormack, president of the Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross, recently hailed the WomenChurch movement as the most important development in the American Catholic Church in the past twenty years, explaining:

*"An explosion of innovative feminist liturgies, rituals and community prayers from different cultures is transforming worship....Because the official teaching of the Church attributes its view of women...to some divine plan, many...are taking a new look at God, peeling away layers of male-biased accretions which have hidden God's true face."*¹²

Christian Feminism?

What caused this mutiny among Catholic women, most of whom once chose to become Brides of Christ? They blame "sexism," charging that from the beginning a patriarchal conspiracy to enslave women distorted Holy Scripture and the Catholic Church. Doubtless some of them had valid grievances against superiors in the Church, not because the offenders were acting out Church teaching but because they were sinful human beings. Because of sin, this will always be an imperfect world, but when the Church distinguishes the naturally complementary roles of men and women, she is defending the

integrity of each sex. Accusing her of hostility toward women ignores her teachings that:

- ★ a woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the highest example of human response to God, Mother of the Church, Queen of the angels, Mother of God;
- ★ the purpose of Creation is to raise up souls to God, a task in which women, as mothers or spiritual mothers, are inevitably central;
- ★ marriage is a Sacrament, a sign of Christ's union with His Church, faithful and indissoluble;
- ★ all human beings are equal in value, all are images of God, all those in a state of sanctifying grace are members of Christ's Mystical Body, in which all vocations, roles and talents work together for the common good.

There can be no "good Christian feminism". Feminism and Catholicism are mutually exclusive, intrinsically contradictory, because feminist ideology puts its own agenda above the truths of the Faith and the authority of the Magisterium. Gender separatism is not a Catholic position but a feminist error; it is feminists who speak as though men and women were of separate and adversarial species. Essentially, feminists do not value womanhood; their only model of human achievement is masculine achievement¹³. That is why they dismiss full-time motherhood as beneath the dignity of women. Their success in promoting that error over the past generation has brought American society to a point where no one is responsible any longer for maintaining the family home and raising the children. The consequent disintegration of the family is recognized by all authorities as the source of

America's gravest social problems, from unwed teen-age pregnancies to drug abuse, to illiteracy to last spring's riots in Los Angeles. Today, in North America's increasingly pagan culture, women and children are sexually exploited, abortion and rape are at all time highs and abandoned women and children make up the fastest-growing poverty class. Yet the feminist-dominated voices of opinion merely urge more government day care as a solution. Only counter-cultural, politically incorrect, non-feminist Christians dare to propose that mothers be allowed to go home.

Concern for woman's dignity and vocation is not a "feminist" cause; it is a Christian cause. Women's legitimate aspirations do not require the discarding of Faith, reason and common sense that constitutes feminism. All the precedent necessary for their legitimate aspirations exists within Catholic tradition. The Valiant Woman of Proverbs not only managed her home but also a fine-linen business. St Catherine of Siena and St Teresa of Avila became Doctors of the Church by being among the most assertive women in history. Mother Teresa walks fearlessly through the squalor and gunfire of the twentieth century. From the powerful abbesses of the Middle Ages to the pioneer sisters who brought the Faith to the New World to the pre-conciliar nuns who were directing hospitals and colleges when few women held such positions in the secular world, women religious have had greater opportunities for education, achievement outside the home and autonomous authority than most women in the world. And in the American Church today, 80 percent

of all so-called “ministry” posts are held by women.

Culture shock

No, the feminist mutiny was not caused by oppression. Its cause was **culture shock**. Caught up in the false “Spirit of Vatican II,” most women’s orders abandoned religious habits, community prayer, community life, obedience in job assignments, even at last the idea of consecration, until the life nuns had originally chosen disintegrated around them. While reeling from those shocks, they were subjected to theological re-education, in Catholic colleges or their own convents. It came in three rapidly successive waves: as neo-modernism, as process theology and as liberation theology.

Neo-modernism is a revival of the old Modernism condemned by Pope Pius X in 1907 as “the synthesis of all heresies.” In the turmoil surrounding the Council, when change was expected, dissenting theologians successfully reasserted it. Since then we have all become familiar with its propositions, which have nearly destroyed catechetics. It holds that:

- ★ the Bible is not historically true;
- ★ the Gospels were written long after Christ died, by men who had never met Him and who invented the Virgin birth and New Testament miracle stories to reinforce their communities.
- ★ Jesus’s ideas were “culture-bound”; He did not know Himself as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, did not intend to found a Church or institute Sacraments;

- ★ the Resurrection was not a historical event but a psychological experience on the part of the Apostles;
- ★ the Church's proper task is building "the Kingdom of God" on earth, **rather than** opposing personal sin.¹⁴

Neo-Modernists see dogmas, Sacraments, even Christ Himself, not as Truths, but as **symbols** that can be redefined. While maintaining the familiar Christian vocabulary, they redefined its meaning.

Why did religious professionals in large numbers swallow this poison? **First**, because they were disoriented by the upheaval in their lives; **second**, because neo-modernism seemed the common wisdom of the learned. Only independent thinkers of strong faith were able to resist what "everyone" thought; weaker personalities succumbed to peer pressure. Many, who discarded the entire pre-conciliar past, were left open to the world, without immunity to the next stage of the theological revolution: **process theology**.

While process theology often uses Christian terms, it is not rooted in Catholic teaching at all but in the pantheist speculations of post-Enlightenment philosophers including:

- ★ Benedict de Spinoza, who wrote in the seventeenth century that perhaps God is not a transcendent being; rather God is everything;
- ★ Georg Hegel, who proposed in the nineteenth century that God is everything and constantly evolving;
- ★ Alfred North Whitehead, who told the twentieth century that God and the universe are constantly being modified by simultaneous evolution.

Process theology holds that God is not an All-Powerful, Immutable, Transcendent Person but an immanent evolutionary force (“the absolute future”) inseparable from and evolving with the material world. There is no transcendent “spiritual” order, no immortal soul, no “Heaven.” Man is the highest development of the evolutionary process, and his role is to move it toward perfection by building Utopia (or “the Kingdom of God”). Religious experience is, like the Apostles’ Resurrection-experience, a psychological phenomenon with no basis in objective reality. Man’s interpretation of his **experience** constitutes “revelation.”¹⁵ Seen in this perspective, God is evolutionary “energy” and religion is psychology.

Those who accepted process theology logically concluded that the Church has lied. Thousands of priests and nuns abandoned their vocations, often for lay jobs in the Church. Many who remained at their posts re-directed their religious zeal into liberation theology, the third wave of post-conciliar “new theology.” Rooted in process theology, liberation theology gives political meaning to Christian terms. **Revelation** becomes the interpretation of one’s experience of oppression, **incarnation** means the immanent process God, **salvation** is the new social order.

It is not by chance that this process view of reality is exactly what is expressed in *Claiming our Truth*. As Dr Ruether has been declaring for some fifteen years, feminist theology is one version of liberation theology. Sister Nadine Foley too, has admitted, “Certainly it is true that experience became the beginning point for theological reflection on religious life, involving a methodology comparable to that which produced liberation theologies.”

What do feminists want from the Church?

Because feminists grumble endlessly about the Church's male priesthood, most people assume they want the priesthood opened to women. Certain individual women do in fact want to be priests; some have left the Catholic Church to be ordained in Protestant denominations. But contrary to popular belief the feminist movement no longer advocates that women be ordained as male priests are ordained. It does not concede that the Church has power to ordain, and it does not want to see women-priests under the authority of bishops. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza warns women that seeking ordination would lead them into a "new clericalism".¹⁶ Dr Ruether has said that women must "demystify in their minds the false idea that priests possess sacramental power."¹⁷ Instead of ordination, feminists like other rebels in the Church today seek an end to ordained priesthood, especially in the power to consecrate the Eucharist.

The most widely circulated rebel theory holds that if Christ is present wherever two or three gather in His Name, it is the community that makes Him present, so the community can choose any member to preside at the Eucharist.¹⁸ That proposition specifically contradicts the Fourth Lateran Council and the Second Vatican Council and was cited by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1975 as cause for condemning the works of Father Hans Kung.

The same seditious logic demeans Christ's Real Presence

in the Eucharist in favour of His presence in the community. Theologian Bernard Cooke, who long ago left the priesthood and the Jesuit Order but continued to teach sacramental theology at a Catholic college until his retirement last year, told the 1991 Call to Action conference,

*“The Eucharist is not the consecrated bread. The Eucharist is a Christian community getting together, using bread and wine to make more intense the presence of the Risen Lord.”*¹⁹

This error is turning up ever more frequently in Catholic publications, catechist training programs and homilies. A Lenten study guide reprinted in one California parish bulletin last year said “Christ is present in our world today...through symbols. We experience Christ present in the community as we gather for the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup...He is present where two or three of us gather in his name.” There was not one word about His Real Presence. And late in 1991, in a widely circulated bulletin insert published by Liguori Publications, one Robert Newmes wrote that Christ is present at Mass in four ways: in the Scripture readings, in the priest, in the community and in the Eucharistic bread. **Equally present**, was his clear implication: if we genuflect before the Tabernacle, he said, we should feel equally called to genuflect before the lectionary. This is a perfect example of distortion in the “Spirit of Vatican II.” *The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy*, says we encounter Christ in all the Sacraments, in Holy Scripture, in the priest, in the poor, in the community. But we find Him there along with the natural substances of these things; they do not become

Christ as the Holy Eucharist becomes Christ, fully and uniquely, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

A growing minority of heterodox Catholic theologians hold, with New Age leader Father Matthew Fox, that it is not even Jesus Christ who is “symbolized” in this new Eucharistic theology, but a “Cosmic Christ” defined as the cosmos itself.²⁰

The substitution of an exclusively “horizontal” faith for the God-centered “vertical” heart of Catholicism has effects in everyday parish life : in the refusal of some priests to genuflect at the Consecration; in the campaign to make the faithful stand through the Canon at Mass; in the casual irreverence with which the Sacred Host is often handled; in the near universal failure of priests and religious to genuflect before the Tabernacle - or to teach their students to do so. Their catechetical dereliction was shamefully exposed when a recent Gallup poll found that only 21 per cent of young adult Catholics, and only half of their elders, could recognize the Catholic definition of the Real Presence even when it was read to them.

No wonder the Church is losing the young. Why celebrate Mass if Christ is already fully present in the community? Why have a Church at all, if God is merely evolutionary energy?

Feminist Spirituality

Why do feminists stay in the Church? The first and unspoken reason, I suspect, is that they cannot find equally powerful or prestigious careers in the secular world, where there is little demand for catechetical

directors. The second reason, announced quite openly, is that the Church can be changed only from within. They frankly state that they intend to vandalize her, to use her resources in seducing her faithful. Dr Ruether advised them, at a 1985 meeting of Chicago Call to Action, "stay in the Church and use whatever parts you can get your hands on." Later her address reached a larger audience when it was published in *America* magazine, the leading Jesuit weekly in the United States.²¹

According to feminist Mary Jo Weaver, the success of the religious revolution will require simultaneous crises in liturgy, authority, doctrine and spirituality.²² Today the first three crises are far advanced, and the rebel emphasis is on spirituality.

According to Sister Madonna Kolbenschlag, "Women are in the process of reversing Genesis, turning the myth on its head." Feminist spirituality is replacing Judaeo-Christian spirituality, she said "dissolving" the "myth and image" of the Christian God by "the process of alienation from the old myth and the reconstruction of a God-myth" rooted in the feminist vision.²³ It should not surprise us that the feminist revolt stirs memories of Eve. Now as in the dawn of history, Satan attacks the human race by striking at women, the bearers of new life, the first and irreplaceable teachers of the young. Kolbenschlag remembers too, and promises that when feminist spirituality has triumphed, Eve's disobedience will be celebrated.

Feminist spirituality echoes the immanentism of process thought but adds to its chill abstraction the drama of ritual and a dim hope of affecting the future with "visualization" or "crystal mysticism". With New Age spiritualism and

romanticized Eastern mysticism, feminist spirituality shares the pantheistic central belief that “All is One, All is God, I am God.” Though not overtly satanic, it is surely demonic in origin and effect. As Creation Spirituality, goddess/ Wicca, Enneagrams, eco-feminism, Jungian Dream interpretation and solstice ceremonies, it saturates North American Catholic institutions today. The eccentric Father Matthew Fox has been a major populariser. He has deluded so many credulous North American religious that his long overdue dismissal from the Dominican Order will not stem the New Age tide he launched throughout the English-speaking world. At his Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California, faculty members include professional witch Starhawk; voodoo priestess Luisah Teish; New Age physicist Brian Swimme; native Indian ritualist Sister Jose Hobday, OSF; American Indian Buck Ghost Horse, who teaches sweat lodge and drumming; ecology absolutists, teachers of “dreamwork”, “transpersonal” psychology, Sufi dance and clay play. The latest Creation Spirituality fad, an “Earth Sabbath” featuring a new list of ten commandments for the “Ecological Age”, is creeping into catechetics programs in the United States and Canada.

But Father Fox is not the only New Age evangelist. Since Father Robert Ochs, SJ, first encountered it at California’s Esalen Institute in the 1970s, Jesuits and other religious have been promoting the Enneagram as though their souls depended on it. Catholic retreat centres and even parishes offer *A Course in Miracles*, a specimen of unalloyed New Age spiritualism purportedly “channeled” by a “spirit guide” to “correct the errors of Christianity.”

Dr Ruether and seven other feminists cited in *Ungodly Rage* have charged that my work misrepresents Catholic feminism by confusing it with “post-Christian” Wicca. Most of the feminist spirituality I have witnessed took place under Catholic auspices and all of it involved Catholic religious professionals. Students at some seminaries have been required to participate in Wicca rituals during liturgy classes. At a Benedictine hospital in St Cloud, Minnesota, the chaplain’s newsletter devoted its July 1991 front page to a solstice prayer to the sun. During “women’s week” at a Catholic women’s college, I watched a nun, who had taught my teen-age children’s religion classes, dance a Wicca ritual with a dozen other women, all of them waving star-tipped wands.

Perhaps the most egregious Catholic Wicca event, however, involved Margot Adler, who never was a Christian. The grand-daughter of renowned psychiatrist Alfred Adler, she was raised in a non-believing family, invented her own forms of paganism in childhood, and is today a coven priestess of Wicca. Her book, *Drawing Down the Moon*, is the most authoritative internal report on contemporary neo-paganism. In October of 1991, at the Sisters of Notre Dame conference centre in Omaha, Nebraska, Adler led a weekend retreat in goddess spirituality. According to the program, participants built “sacred altars” and danced “ecstatic rituals” in “sacred circles” to celebrate “the goddess within” because “we ourselves are sacred and flowing with potential.”

Why would any educated person believe in such preposterous nonsense? C. S. Lewis said pantheism is “probably the most primitive of all religions,” a belief to which the

human mind naturally turns without the gift of divine revelation. But today's promoters of immanent pantheist notions do not in fact seem to believe in them; among feminist leaders I have seen few signs of any religious impulse, pagan or Christian. But feminist theologian Carol Christ in telling of the invention of goddess/Wicca by contemporary feminists, explained its real purpose:

“Symbol systems cannot simply be rejected; they must be replaced. Where there is not any replacement, the mind will revert to familiar structures at times of crisis, bafflement or defeat.”²⁴

Feminist spirituality is admittedly not an end, then, but like the calls for ordination, inclusive liturgical language and altar girls, it is a tactic in the battle to destroy the Faith. Obviously, these rebels entirely reject Catholicism. Catholic feminism is not a schism, because schism retains the Church's doctrine while rejecting her authority. It is not a heresy, for heresy discards only part of the truth. It is an apostasy to an utterly alien belief system. As Cardinal Ratzinger has observed, feminists are inventing a new religion. It is not a Christian religion.

Does it harm anyone other than feminists themselves? It harms every Catholic. Church institutions are now so infected with feminism that even Catholics who abhor it cannot entirely escape its effects.

- * The rebel ascendancy in Catholic education robs children of their faith. As one young priest observed, “The kids don't believe the nonsense they're taught but don't know it isn't Catholicism.” So they turn away to secular hedonism, or

fundamentalism, or New Age paganism.

- ★ The emasculation of liturgical language disgracefully politicizes the Mass. Worse, it distorts doctrinal meaning, changing Jesus' Loving Father into an abstraction, more like the process theology's impersonal "universal energy".
- ★ By driving boys from altar service, the progressive feminisation of worship cuts off a rich source of priestly vocations and encourages false aspirations in the altar girls who displace them.
- ★ Feminists talk about "pluralism" or "dialogue", but once in power they are tyrants who sacrifice justice to ideological conformity. Though no parish education program ever has enough catechists, for example, I have met experienced teachers who were dismissed for objecting to neo-modernist Scripture interpretation, for teaching their classes about purgatory, for teaching that the devil is real, even for teaching the Rosary.

The Good News

Of course feminists do not speak for Catholic women, or for Catholic men. Believers recoil in horror from the mad notion of overthrowing God. Lay Catholics do not want to know how to "image" new gods or rewrite Genesis; they want to know whether the Church will ever recover her serene certitude. Many wonder if it is true that the Faith has changed. Conscientious parents wonder how to educate their children in Catholic doctrine and morality when diocesan and parish programs are so often subver-

sive and parental objections so seldom get a hearing. They wonder whether the future will bring further demolition of Catholic tradition, or whether, at last, we will see the “new Pentecost” promised by Vatican II.

Yet, amid all the bad news, there is good news. However confused and dispirited the majority of Catholics may be, they are desperately hungry for Truth. And there is a core of fervent believers eager to help restore the Church. Something extraordinary is going on at the grassroots. God seems to be stirring what is left of His people to defend what is left of His Church. This faithful core is filling with enthusiastic young believers, in love with Christ and determined to stand with Him at any cost. Many of them are women, but many are men, too. Many are priests, often YOUNG priests. Many are converts. Others are re-converts, those who once fell away from a Faith they scarcely knew, but through God’s great mercy discovered it again. There is so little natural explanation for these conversions that we cannot fail to see His hand in it. In a re-enactment of the King’s wedding supper for His Son, God is gathering new guests from the highways and hedges to replace the invited who spurned His feast.

The second part of the good news is that this wave of believers is clearly the wave of the future, because the revolution has no future. Twenty five years ago, Catholic radicals were sure that the orthodox would be extinct by now. Today they see that it is their “party of change” that is withering because it can only drive people out of the Church; it cannot attract recruits to its ranks. Mary Louise Hartman, president of the heterodox Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church wrote, in her account of

the round of rebel conferences she had attended during 1991, "I asked myself, where are the young people ...by which I mean those under 40?"

Under a grant from the Lilly Endowment, feminist scholar Mary Jo Weaver is writing a book about Catholic "fundamentalists." She has said she hopes to explain the unexpected survival of Catholics who believe the Mass is a sacrifice, who believe Mary is the Queen of Heaven, who believe in the devil and the reality of personal sin. She is puzzled by "the rise in vocations in traditional religious orders, while liberal orders continue to attract only a few", by "the dramatic rise in priestly vocations in ultra conservative dioceses;" and the popularity of new, traditionally Catholic colleges.

It is true. In American Catholicism today, the orthodox offer the only evidence of vitality. They are trying to do for themselves what the Church does where she is healthy. Major organizations have arisen to answer the Second Vatican Council's call for lay action, and also small spontaneous groups all across the nation. There are hundreds of Marian groups. Eight thousand people attended a Marian conference in Iowa last summer, and it was only one of thirty major Marian conferences held in the United States in 1992. There is growing resistance to defective catechetics; orthodox young parents see that if they are going to transmit the Faith to their children they must teach it themselves. Parents and orthodox religious have established private Catholic academies in most states. The homeschooling movement is exploding in every corner of the continent.

What should other Catholics do in this war for the Faith?

(1) Pray. Attend Mass daily if possible. The Blessed Mother has promised to protect those who consecrate themselves to her and pray her Rosary faithfully, so we must place ourselves and our families in her hands.

(2) Vote with your feet. Join the best parish available, where you can worship without gnashing your teeth. If you find a good pastor, good nuns and a sound Catholic school, cherish them with prayer, encouragement - and money.

(3) Guard your children. Withdraw them from all Church programs unless you know **beyond question** that they are orthodox. Do not wait until your children have lost their Faith, to recognize the threat to their Faith. And tell your children why you are withdrawing them. It may indeed lead them to a “fortress mentality” but a fortress mentality might save their souls.

(4) Be Prophetic. If family responsibilities allow, stay on Church boards and councils as witnesses for truth. To do so takes courage. You will be castigated, and the chance of success is frankly slight. Remember that Christ said to rejoice when men revile you for His sake, for your reward will be great in Heaven.

(5) Love your enemies. That does not mean we can pretend all is well with our religious professionals. Their tragic state should remind us to pray always for the grace of perseverance. In justice and charity, we **must** point out their errors, but we seek conversion, not revenge, so we must also pray that God give them the grace to repent. And we must rejoice in their return, when it comes, if it comes.

(6) Love your friends. Learn to disagree about prudential matters without accusing each other of evil intentions.

(7) Pray for the gift of fortitude. Reject any temptation to abandon the Church for a schismatic group. Where Peter is, there is the Church.

(8) Find a support group. We all need the company of other believers. We might find it in Opus Dei, Communion and Liberation, Regnum Christi or a charismatic prayer group. If no group exists in your neighbourhood, you might begin to build a genuine “faith community” by starting a basic doctrine class for adults, in a parish if possible, perhaps beginning with *The Credo of the People of God*. To do so is a spiritual work of mercy.

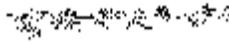
(9) Women religious must inform themselves about feminism so they will recognize the strategies that will be used to try to lead them astray. But even those in corrupt and dying communities can serve the Church heroically by offering up their suffering.

(10) Priests serve the Church best by proclaiming Christ’s Truth, providing the Sacraments and encouraging Confessions.

(11) The bishop bears heavy burdens. He is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the Church’s doctrine, and for preaching it (including her teaching on priesthood) with uncompromising and joyous conviction: for promoting adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and encouraging confessions: for fostering marital chastity by providing Natural Family Planning programs: for understanding and opposing the sin of feminism: for helping parents to educate their children, which means removing all dissent-

ing texts from Catholic educational institutions, and all dissenters too: for teaching adult men and women about their rights and obligations as Catholics. The documents needed for a thorough and vital study program are already available in *The Credo of the People of God*, *Humanae Vitae*, *Familiaris Consortio*, and *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

Defending the faith today demands faith, hope, charity, the courage to speak the truth in the face of criticism, and the patience to endure apparent failure. In the end, only Christ can save His Church, and He has promised to do so. Our only certain contribution is personal holiness: we must reform ourselves, remembering that no one in this life is immune from sin and error. We know the Faith will live, though we have no guarantee that the Church will soon be restored in our own countries. We cannot expect a guarantee, knowing that Our Saviour Himself died a failure in the eyes of the world. As Mother Teresa reminds us, we are not called to win, only to be faithful.



1. See Mary Elsbernd OSF & Marilyn Thei, SC, “*What’s at Stake: Women Religious Naming Ourselves Women*,” in *Claiming Our Truth*, Nadine Foley, OP, editor, LCWR, 1988, 143-162. The authors recommend reading the works of Starhawk, a professional witch who teaches at Father Matthew Fox’s Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality.
2. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism & Godtalk*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1983. Re Jesus, see 116-122; 134-138. Re life after death, see 257-258.

3. Ibid. 135.
4. She teaches “applied theology” at Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Illinois.
5. Sandra Schneiders, IHM, *Beyond Patching*, Paulist Press, 1991, 99.
6. See citations in Donna Steichen, *Ungodly Rage*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1991,92.
7. See Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1985, 119-127.
8. See *Transforming Grace* by Sr. Ann Carr, BVM, (process theology); see also *Transformation of American Catholic Sisters*, ed. Srs. Lora Quinonez & Mary Daniel Turner, both past LCWR ex. dirs (Temple University Press, 1992). See *Midwives of Future*, ed. Sr Ann Patrick Ware; *Beyond Patching*, by Sandra Schneiders. Especially see *Claiming Our Truth*, Nadine Foley, OP, ed., Washington, D.C., Leadership Conference Women Religious, 1988.
9. Joan Chittister, OSB, “The point is that religious life is at the brink of renewal and faced with two choices: personal comfort or prophetic presence.” *National Catholic Reporter*, Feb. 21, 1992, 14-15.
10. Elsbernd & Thei, 144-149.
11. For further information about their pro-homosexual New Ways Ministry, see *Ungodly Rage*, 341-343.
12. Sister Maureen McCormack, SL, “Toward the Year 2000,” in special supplement “Theologians at Large,” *The Tablet*. Jan. 25, 1992.

13. Weaver, 140.
14. See Edith Myers, "Why are Catholics Leaving the Church?" *Religious Life*, January 1992, 1.
15. See Edith Myers, "Process Theology versus Christianity," *Religious Life*, January 1992, 4.
16. Weaver, 161.
17. See *Ungodly Rage*, 347.
18. See three part series by ex-Jesuit Bernard Cooke in *National Catholic Reporter*, May, 1990.
19. Bernard Cooke: "Whose Eucharist is it?" *Call to Action Churchwatch*, October 1992, 7.
20. See Matthew Fox, *Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 67-73, 161, 140, 214.
21. Rosemary Ruether "Crises and Challenges of Catholicism Today," *America*, March 1, 1986, 152,
22. Weaver, 146.
23. Quoted in *Ungodly Rage*, 150.
24. Carol Christ, "Why women need the goddess," in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womenspirit Rising*, San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1979, 273-287.

Donna Steichen is a Catholic journalist whose writing focuses on feminism, life issues, education, and other problems confronting the family and the church in contemporary society. She is best known for her groundbreaking reports on turmoil in the Catholic Church. Her book, *Ungodly Rage: The Hidden Face of Catholic Feminism*, is the definitive study of the philosophical roots and destructive effects of feminist activism in the Catholic Church. Within the first month of its publication by Ignatius press, the book went into a second printing and is currently a Catholic bestseller.

Educated in public and parochial schools, Donna Steichen is an honours graduate of St. Cloud State University. She is a wife and mother, and the grandmother of fourteen. While raising her four children, Mrs Steichen held many of the positions customarily held by Catholic mothers: she was a catechist for more than twenty years, held office in the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, was a member of parish and diocesan boards of education and a discussion leader in adult and children's education groups. She has been active in the pro-life movement since 1970. From 1983 to 1986, she served as president of the Minnesota Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, resigning from that office when she realized that the Church's chief enemies today are not external but internal.

Feminism and the Catholic Faith